

"Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves, therefore, are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe, their minds must be improved to a certain degree." – Thomas Jefferson

In the above quote inscribed by one of our nation's more influential and enlightened founding fathers, it is implicitly stated that in order to prevent the degeneration of government, it is duly necessary for the minds of the mass public to be illuminated by the knowledge that will allow them to prohibit and defeat any efforts that indicate a tyrannical uprising. Therefore, not only is it the people's right, but it is also their responsibility, to become well-equipped with the knowledge and abilities that will allow them to contribute to the success and continuation of the principles comprising the great American democracy.

Obtaining a liberal arts education is perhaps one of the more efficacious ways in which an individual can acquire this aptitude. This system of undergraduate education stresses the importance of allowing individuals the freedom to think critically and independently. The meaning of the term "liberal arts" is derived from the Greek word *eleutheros* and the Latin word *liber*, both of which mean "free;" consequently, the ability to think freely is a main focal point for liberal arts institutions. A liberal arts education is designed to help students develop a wide range of intellectual capabilities by allowing them to solve problems in a multitude of areas, think critically, generate creative and independent thoughts, contemplate issues of ethics and morality, respect the rights of others in a diverse society, become appreciative of the many forms of artistic beauty, and most prominently, to effectively participate as a citizen in a free society. These values recognized by liberal arts institutions coincide with the same values of the United States government, as demonstrated by its democratic principles.

Of these principles, which auspiciously include life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, the preservation of the common good, justice, equality, diversity, truth, popular sovereignty, and patriotism, along with many essential constitutional principles, liberty is perhaps the most fundamental value that enables the continuation of an effective democracy. The right to liberty is an irrevocable aspect of the human condition. From this right emanates the indispensable essence of personal freedom (the private realm in which an individual is free to act, free to think, free to believe, free to choose, and in which the government cannot rightfully invade); liberty also constitutes the vital aspects of political and economic freedoms as well. The concept of liberty, and the personal freedoms therein, reflect the goals and values recognized by liberal arts institutions.

Subsequently, the system of liberal arts is a highly effective way in which an individual can "improve their mind" by acquiring the ability to think freely and analytically. This valuable undergraduate system and the abilities it helps to develop, if effectively exercised, contributes greatly to the success, security, and continuation of the democratic principles comprising the United States democracy.