

# **A Liberal Arts Education**

## **Liberal Learning**

To be liberally educated is to be transformed. Open and free inquiry, a devotion to excellence, the development of character, the mastery of competencies, the ability to think critically, the excitement and rewards of learning—these are the aims and principles of a liberal arts education.

Liberal learning frees us from the restraints of time and place, enabling us to grow, to change and to respond to the new, the unforeseen, and the unexpected. To be liberally educated is to live imaginatively in worlds not our own and to examine values not of our making.

A liberal education tests our ability to investigate and understand the nature of an organism, the applications of a theorem, the behavior of a crowd, the principles of a political system, the meaning of a poem, the causes of an event, the consequences of an argument or the composition of a symphony.

Liberal education promotes diversity, skepticism and debate. It views the world as changing, not fixed. It asks not only what, but also why. It insists that we make judgments rather than have opinions; that we treat ideas seriously, not casually; that we be committed instead of indifferent.

Above all, however, a liberal education is a function of choice and self-discipline. Lawrence provides opportunities; it does not prescribe decisions. The privilege of liberal learning is the freedom to choose; the challenge of liberal learning is to choose responsibly.

Students come to Lawrence with many career objectives and options—law, public service, health professions, business, service vocations, engineering, teaching, and ministry. Liberal education is a prerequisite to all of these and more. Liberal learning provides the skills, the talents, the critical intelligence and the range that offers access to many careers.

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## **A Lawrence Education**

“Welcome to the company of educated men and women.”

With these words, university presidents traditionally salute Bachelor of Arts recipients at Commencement. In the centuries since that greeting was first proclaimed, the definition of the educated man or woman has expanded. Two and one-half centuries ago, a college curriculum was relatively uniform and straightforward; the “liberal arts” numbered seven. Today, the curriculum is diverse and complex; the liberal arts find expression in many disciplines and departments, use a variety of methodologies and skills and are conveyed by courses numbering in the hundreds.

No one—neither student nor faculty member—can master all available disciplines and subject matters. When graduates are hailed among the company of educated men and women, each will have reached that state by selecting a program of courses unique to him or her.

“What one knows is, in youth, of little moment,” wrote Henry Adams; “they know enough who know how to learn.”

Lawrence does not pretend to certify that every graduate possesses a prescribed amount of knowledge. But the university does claim that the education students attain here marks them as persons who have developed the abilities to think critically, write clearly and speak effectively.

The route to liberal education lies in a course of study that combines both breadth and depth. The Lawrence curriculum promotes exposure to a wide range of subject matters and intellectual approaches. It also calls for the focused study of a single area of knowledge. Within this general framework, the student exercises wide latitude in building a course of study. A Lawrence education, then, results from considered choices. The college provides ample room for such choices and encourages students to exercise them boldly.

## **A Residential Community**

Lawrence is by design a residential college. All students live on campus because we believe that a small residential community with abundant opportunities for personal interaction outside the classroom provides the proper environment for a liberal arts education. Located near downtown Appleton on the banks of the Fox River, the Lawrence campus has become the cultural and intellectual heart of a vibrant, modern, Midwestern community.

At the core of everything we do is a deep commitment to our mission to educate men and women in the liberal arts and sciences: developing intellect, talent, knowledge and understanding; cultivating judgment and values; and preparing students for lives of service, achievement, leadership and personal fulfillment.