

Dear Kate,

I wanted to follow up my recent communication concerning why I have such strong feelings about continuing to teach during the DePauw winter term. I would ask that you forward this on to whoever is making the decisions regarding the 2010 term.

Last year I read an article in **Liberal Education** from the Association of American Colleges and Universities entitled “Engaged Learning and the Core Purposes of Liberal Education” by Donald W. Harward, president emeritus of Bates College (Vol. 93, No. 1, Winter 2007). Early in the article is the following quote:

*There has been, and remains, a “triad” of interrelated core purposes for liberal education: the **epistemic** (coming to know, discovery, and the advancing of knowledge and understanding); the **eudemonic** (the fuller realization of the learner, the actualizing of the person’s potential – classically to achieve individual well-being and happiness); and the **civic** (the understanding that learning puts the learner in relation to what is other, to community and its diversity in the broadest sense, as well as the responsibility that comes from sustaining the community and the civic qualities that make both open inquiry and self-realization possible).*

On one level, we have lost track of this complexity – focusing in the academy only on the epistemic. On another level, we have hardly attended to the issue of purpose at all. The gaining and transfer of knowledge and discovery, the “epistemic” purpose of liberal education, has been emphasized at the expense of the other core purposes – namely, fostering self-discovery and well-being, and establishing the relationship between knowledge and responsibility for what is beyond self, the “civic” purpose.

If the author of this article is correct (and I believe he is) then courses which encourage students to not only increase their academic knowledge, but to learn how to use this knowledge to create flourishing lives that are in concert with the needs of the larger community, are consistent with the triad of objectives for liberal institutions such as DePauw. The class I teach is designed to challenge the students to think about what leads to successful living, or to a “considered, consequential and happy life”. Students are challenged to do this through reading what others have discovered (specifically Dan Baker, Nathan Branden and Viktor Frankl and the authors of assigned articles), hearing from noted alumni (Dennis Bland), learning from other students through dialogue, by hearing perspectives that I provide and by doing and reflecting upon an act of community giving.

I have been a student of this subject for many years. From preparing for this class and conducting it these past four years, I have formed a perspective that in general those who are truly happy have an underlying and predominant sense of serenity and acceptance about the past, optimism and faith about the future and live in the present with joy and exuberance. This perspective is sourced from a life integrated by meaningful purpose,

sound principles and enhanced by enduring healthy relationships. It is to enable the students to further build such a life, a considered and consequential life, that the course is dedicated.

Knowing what leads to happiness is far easier than actually living consistent with this knowledge. The course is designed to challenge the students to determine what behaviors lead to such a life, to reflect upon their own actions and to consider what changes they could make to enhance their level of happiness or eudemonia. Students learn about the power of forgiveness, of appreciation/gratitude, of optimism, of purpose (flow), of integrating one's life, of thinking with abundance and of pleasure (both its positive and negative powers). Students are further challenged to consider how they relate to the community as a whole and what it feels like to do public service. This past year we spent a day working with Habitat for Humanity of Indianapolis.

In net, I believe that in some ways this is a quintessential liberal arts course combining the epistemic, eudemonic and civic aspects of a liberal education.

The feedback I have received from students who have taken the course has amazed me. The first year as the last class ended 20 students handed me personal hand written letters expressing appreciation for my teaching the course. I was overwhelmed by this gesture and it turned what I thought would be a one time deal, into returning for the next three years to teach at DePauw.

The evaluations of the course by the students have always been very positive. Each year students assess the course by stating whether they agree or disagree with 10 statements including "the course objective was achieved", "I would recommend this course to other students", and "this course was worth the investment of time and money". The answers are quantitative with **1** being "strongly disagree" and **5** being "strongly agree". From all 27 students in the first year's class all ten questions received a "**5**". The following three years have been very close to this level of evaluation. Additionally students are asked to provide other comments. Below are a few of the comments from the student evaluations of the 2009 class:

I learned that being an individual (inside out) can bring me real happiness, instead of always conforming in order to be accepted. My choices can bring me happiness. I learned that I have a lot to be proud of as an individual. I am worthy and should not be scared to be confident. You helped me realize that I have the ability to look back at the past with serenity even if my brother died. I don't need to ever feel guilty for being alive and happy at that. You guys [there were two of us teaching in 2009] helped me so much and I greatly appreciate it.

This course allowed me to gain a new perspective on all things in my life, good or bad and will allow me to live life more fully. I learned that I have been very pessimistic and anxious about things in my life I cannot change. I believe that I can change myself and become happier.

I am becoming more conscious about the everyday unconscious actions that can deteriorate my overall happiness/state of mind/well-being. I learned that I am a very aggressive person when I try to convey my feelings/opinions to others. I am working on listening and staying in the green zone.

It helped me to reflect on myself and make goals. I also learned a lot about purpose and how to lead a happy, healthy lifestyle. I learned how afraid I was of the future and how to deal with set backs. I leave the class feeling refreshed and better understanding how to react to certain situations.

Teaching this course the past four years has challenged me and provided me the opportunity to live a more considered and consequential life. Of greater consequence to DePauw, it is has clearly challenged and helped DePauw students do the same. I believe it is a valuable addition to the DePauw curriculum.

I hope you and the faculty will look favorably upon the course.

Doug Smith
September 16, 2009