

Liberal Arts: Embracing the Unknown

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I've always been daunted by the unknowns of the future. Everyone is familiar with the classic cliché of "What do you want to be when you grow up?". I faced this question every time my extended family gathered together. Without fail, at some point amidst the occasion, my uncle would turn to me and ask: "So...have you figured out what you want to do with your life?" After a few seconds of uncomfortable pause, I usually responded with some variation of "I'm workin' on it!" followed by a laugh to mask my unease. I had come to expect this question at every gathering, and while my uncle was always only 'slightly' serious about this question, he liked to poke fun at my indecisiveness. These conversations pressured me to identify my one *true* calling, and I didn't know it then, but I would carry the weight of this question well into my college years.

Before I knew it, I entered my freshman year at Truman State University still entirely unsure of what I wanted to do with my life, remaining undeclared well into my sophomore year. I wish I could say that there was a moment of clarity or enlightenment that led me to declare my interest in education and sociology, but in reality, I happened upon these subjects accidentally. During my second year living on campus, I found myself randomly placed in a residential Living Learning Community (LLC) for future teachers. It was through making connections with those living alongside me in this community that I realized teaching was something I could see myself pursuing in my future. During this time, I was enrolled in an introductory sociology class which solely served as a Social Perspective course. Much to my surprise, I ended up enjoying this course more than I anticipated, and needing a major to specialize in aside from my pre-education interest, I declared my major in sociology. If not for the Social Perspective

course requirement within Truman's liberal arts framework, I might not have discovered my passion for sociology.

Although I had officially declared my interests, I felt as if I had to choose one or the other. Up to this point, I believed that the goal of college was to find and explore one interest. It wasn't until I took a course titled *Social Problems* within my sociology major, that I realized how intertwined the disciplines of sociology and education are. Classroom discussions centering around educational and socioeconomic inequalities transformed my teaching philosophy. I found myself making connections between the discussions in my education classes and the readings in my sociology classes. When assigned an essay reflecting on my own personal teaching philosophy, I realized that my passion for teaching had only grown. I wrote about how educators play an important role in closing achievement gaps and advocating for low-income and minority students. Every child has the potential to succeed, and it is an educator's responsibility to provide the support necessary for them to reach this potential. My teaching philosophy now lies in my desire to give back to my community and make a meaningful impact in the lives of students who need support the most. This passion has propelled me to apply for the St. Louis Teacher Residency, an alternative teaching certification program dedicated to addressing educational inequities in the St. Louis region by placing high-quality teachers in high-needs classrooms. This program would not only allow me to give back to the community I grew up in, St. Louis City, but would also provide me with the opportunity to make a truly meaningful impact on students in underserved schools.

My liberal arts education has allowed me to develop critical thinking and interpersonal skills that will allow me to thrive wherever the future takes me. Stepping

out of my comfort zone, I embraced opportunities to conduct and present my own research, facilitate discussions among peers from a variety of disciplines, and build connections and relationships that will outlast my time at Truman. I have been given the freedom to make connections locally and globally, gaining teaching experience in local elementary classrooms and working with high school and college students from across the world through a remote activism-based internship. Next semester, I will have the opportunity to fully combine my interests in sociology and education as a Teaching Assistant for the course that prompted me to connect my interests in the first place: *Social Problems*.

Not only have I been influenced by courses within the disciplines of sociology and education, but also by other courses I have taken through Truman's liberal arts curriculum. The discussions in my *LGBTQ+ and Religion in America* course provided me with a deeper understanding of the judgment and lack of support many students face for expressing their identities. My *Criminological Theory* course broadened my awareness of the structural barriers that many youth in disadvantaged communities face, a disproportionate number of which are students of color. I was able to develop my creativity by taking *Creative Writing* and a Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar course titled *Creativity in Arts and Sciences*. These classes provided me with a creative outlet and illustrated the importance of allowing students to develop their own sense of creativity in the classroom. The fusion of education, sociology, and other non-major courses has developed my sense of awareness of and appreciation for a diverse range of perspectives and life experiences.

At the start of my college journey, I envisioned a singular path that I would follow for the rest of my life. What I found is a multitude of intersecting pathways. My liberal arts education has forever changed my perception of what the future can hold, and as my final semester of college approaches, I now realize that having a variety of interests is a strength. Instead of feeling tied to just one thing, I find comfort in knowing that my interests and skills can lead me in many directions. No one can ever be completely sure of what the future has in store, however, my liberal arts education has taught me to embrace the journey yet to come and face the unknowns of my future head-on.