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The Interconnected Nature of a Liberal Arts Education

Throughout my childhood, I must have changed my future career goals dozens of times. Every time I found a new hobby or something that interested me, I wanted to shape my life around it. My parents always encouraged my three siblings and me to explore what we were passionate about, and that the best way to do this was through our education. Because of this, I devoted myself to every class, and there was hardly any subject that I didn't love learning about, any career that I hadn't thought about pursuing. As I entered high school and began preparing for college I felt pressure to choose just one of these passions and make a career out of it, even if this meant giving up my other interests. Although I wasn't completely sure of an exact career path, I knew that I wanted to become fluent in a language and be able to travel, and that eventually I wanted to work in advocacy. Still, I thought that my education needed to follow a singular path to successfully transition into the workforce one day. This changed when I visited SUNY Geneseo and started to explore what a liberal arts education could look like.

I decided to enter Geneseo as an international relations major because I knew that this would allow me to explore a wide variety of subjects and skills. Still, I never anticipated how much I would get out of this particular program. It only took my very first class of Professor Ibrahim's International Politics for me to feel confident that I had chosen the right academic path at Geneseo. In this class I had assumed to solely be lecture-based, we were not only learning about the basic theories of international relations like realism or constructivism, but we were challenged through class discussions to use these theories to look at the world around us through a critical lens. Also within my first semester, I was placed in an Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies class where I had a similar experience. I began to look for ways in which I could incorporate what I was learning about feminist theory and power structures in society into my

other classes. I was fascinated by the material and I realized that continuing to study in the Women's and Gender Studies department would only enhance my understanding of international relations. I could not get enough of every discussion and every day I looked forward to hearing new perspectives from my classmates that often made me rethink my takeaways from our readings. I found that many of my classmates shared the same type of community-oriented focus and passion for learning. I quickly realized that this sort of environment that encourages active participation and critical thinking was not unique to these two classes but an integral part of being a liberal arts student.

One of my most important goals throughout my college experience, both personally and academically, has been to learn another language. Along with international relations, I elected to study Spanish to achieve this goal. However, I knew that studying a language consists of so much more than simply learning the grammar structures or new vocabulary. By studying Spanish I am studying the cultures it is tied to and learning how to communicate with those around me on a deeper level. For me, language learning is such an integral part of a liberal arts education that broadens our understanding of the world. Because of this, something that was very important to me was spending a semester abroad and immersing myself in a new culture. Immersing myself in the language and the culture of Spain has only strengthened the educational foundation that I have been building.

Something particularly rewarding about going to a liberal arts college is seeing the many ways in which my many different academic passions overlap and connect. The first time I really felt this way was in my Women and Politics class where we focused on the intersection of identity and political participation, with a particular focus on gender. I've had a similar experience in my Government and Politics of Latin America class where I've been able to take

my studies of Spanish language and culture one step further by learning about the politics of Spanish-speaking countries and watching films in Spanish. Although international relations largely focuses on culture, I did not imagine that my studies in this department would align so well with those in Spanish. During my college career, I have rarely had to compartmentalize the materials from each of my classes to avoid confusion. On the contrary, I have pursued a very interconnected plan of study that has helped me create a strong base of knowledge that I can build upon outside of the classroom. These classes have reminded me of the fact that everything that we learn is interconnected in some way, we just have to look for these connections.

Geneseo's location in a small town provides each student with the perfect opportunity to get involved with the community. As I discovered very quickly when I entered college, a liberal arts institution attracts a specific type of student, one who is passionate about seeing real change in their community. I have been inspired by many of these students to find new ways to get involved in organizations that I am passionate about. Last year, one of my friends in the Spanish department encouraged me to join a community organization that she had been working with called Cultures Learning Together. I decided to join and began working with Spanish-speaking families in the Geneseo community as an English mentor. I've begun to realize what teaching a language consists of while learning from others' cultures and experiences through our lessons. This program has allowed me to apply what I have learned in my classes in such a way that is so meaningful to me. I am confident in the fact that I want to pursue a career where I can speak Spanish and I've also come to learn that I want to spend more time teaching English after I graduate.

After spending so much time thinking that I had to choose just one passion to follow in my career, my liberal arts education has made me much more open-minded to the opportunities

that await me. Though there is still the part of me that is unsure of my future, what I want to focus on upon graduation in the fall is simply continuing to learn and to look at how the world around me is connected, even if it does not seem to be at first. Seeking out these connections has given me the confidence to ask critical questions and explore the world around me to build upon the foundation of knowledge that I have gained by studying at a public liberal arts college.