

## Global Issues

1. Our planet is endangered.
2. There is almost no scientific disagreement that global warming is happening and that humans are contributing to it.
3. Our nation consumes much more per capita than do other nations, and we are not responsibly using the world's resources.
4. Natural systems across earth are interconnected. For example, sea surface temperatures in northern Australia can affect whether or not there will be anchovies on Peru's coast.
5. Globalization has reframed social issues like poverty, epidemics, the environment, and terror.
6. Civilizations are clashing.

## Inequality

1. There are social class disparities in our country, including disparities in access to quality education.
2. Whiteness as an often invisible ethnicity has important societal implications.
3. Given that we spend a lot more of our resources dealing with the psychological problems of adults than those of kids, apparently we view adults as being more important than kids.

## Nature of Science

1. The theory of evolution is *just* a theory.
2. Darwin did not just make up evolution; he was working within a set of discourses that continue, themselves, to evolve to this day.
3. Science can tell us what is possible in areas of "new medicine," such as human embryonic stem cell research, human cloning, genetic enhancement, and transhumanism, but science is not equipped to tell us what should be done. An ethical system that exists outside of science will be required if we are to avoid the errors of pragmatism, which were manifested in Stalin's USSR and Hitler's Germany.
4. Claims of scientific "truths" have been used to justify genocide, racism, colonialism, and sexism.

## Citizenship

1. Citizenship is a set of *performed actions* rather than just a right or a privilege.
2. Rhetoric is traditionally at the center of liberal arts education, and it is always the one single liberal art that is *necessary* in a democratic culture; it simply is not possible to sustain a democracy

without a populace schooled in rhetoric.

3. A responsible person must have a well-defined conception of what is good, which he has examined carefully so that it is worthy of respect. In order to put that conception of the good into action, one must be aware of how individuals and institutions persuade others to give them attention and allegiance; and one must be competent to judge whether attention and allegiance ought to be given. These are essential skills for citizens of a democracy: certifying students as "educated" and sending them out into the world without these skills is not only unfortunate, it is dangerous.
4. More solutions to problems appear when conflict is "surfaced" in dialogue instead of polarized in argument or repressed in avoidance and disengagement. Our private interests *can* be used in the public sphere to guide dialogue for the common good--*if* we practice dialogue instead of debate.
5. Students tend not to have much power; their personal actions tend not to have much consequence on the world around them.
6. Religion is playing an increasingly dangerous role in our public life in the United States, but very few are willing to engage the topic from a critical perspective.
7. Many Americans tend to grossly oversimplify issues that they vote on, particularly issues related to religion.
8. Many Americans vote against their own interests.

### **Knowledge**

1. There are at least two quite different standards for judgment. Jerome Bruner, the great psychologist and cognitive scientist, argues in his book "Actual Minds; Possible Worlds (Harvard University Press, 1986) that "There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two, though complementary, are irreducible to one another" (p.11). Each has its own standard of judgment. The one, the logico-scientific, which he calls paradigmatic, is assessed in terms of how well it is formed, and the standard of judgment is the match of its conclusions with the empirical world. In a word, it relies on Tarski's kind of truth with a little "t". The second, which he designates as the narrative, is judged in terms of its "verisimilitude," its lifelikeness. "The imaginative application of the narrative mode leads instead to good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily "true") historical accounts. It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put timeless miracles into the particulars of experience and to locate the experience in time and space" (p.13). The failure to recognize this great difference is one source of the failure to communicate amongst the several disciplines. Instead epithets of "scientistic power-hungry drivel" and "weak-minded story-telling" (and worse) are hurled across the Two Cultures divide.
2. Truth is in the eye of the beholder.
3. The only way to get ideas to stick is to give students the tools to come up with them themselves or at least be able to appreciate the scholarship upon which they are based.
4. Empathy is the highest use of the human intellect, because it expands the mind to transcend one's

own experience. It is the irreducible reason we ever go beyond our own interests in any way.

5. Language tends to shape, and not only express, thinking.
6. Various media (advertising, news, entertainment) construct reality for us.
7. News media have transformed our roles as agents and recipients of knowledge.
8. Games, simulations, and immersions provide powerful ways to think, more so than do linear media such as text and video.

### **Moral Dimensions of Education**

1. A liberal arts education should not merely give students the *ability* to engage their culture critically, but it should make students see that they *must* engage their culture critically. In a democratic culture, "critical thinking" about public issues is not a right or a privilege -- it is an *obligation*. Getting students to feel this obligation, this duty, is the very core of a liberal arts education. It is too often left unarticulated or implicit when it should be made both explicit and compelling.
2. Treatment of topics in the classroom should be scrupulously fair and evidence-based.
3. Education is never "values neutral" - as much as people in the sciences claim otherwise. Agendas and biases are always mixed in with our analysis.
4. It is not a bad thing to allow instructors to teach what interests them deeply, so long as they believe it to be relevant to the students and they don't force personal opinions on them.
5. There is a gap that ought to be bridged between academic knowledge and social practice.
6. Teaching ought to be a form of activism, helping students to think critically about and to engage with the world around them.
7. Teaching is the most subversive of all activities. Objectivity is a goal, but is not humanly attainable. Consequently instructors' views and values influence what and how they teach; the best they can do is try to be responsible for this by facing it as objectively and ethically as possible. Encouraging independent thought is a politically dangerous and radical project.
8. Instructors need to stop teaching students about the world in ways that make it seem as if everything is all right, in ways that make it seem as if everything has been decided already.
9. Liberal education ought to help students to undergo personal transformation.
10. Liberal education ought to teach people to operate ethically in a market economy.
11. As a minimum, a well-educated person should have in place at the end of her formal education a system of ethics and an understanding of rhetoric and argumentation. In an era whose buzzword is (rightly) "globalization," but which simultaneously glorifies "instant gratification," it is ever more rare, and ever more important, that individuals think about the motivations as well as the

consequences of their actions.

12. Liberal education ought to teach the kinds of interpersonal skills that make for a good society.

13. The usual university-level practice is toward constructing an argument, and that is also the usual conversational style among people anyway: in other words, instead of really listening to and trying to understand another person's needs and perspective, we build up our counterpoints in our heads, even with our friends and family in our private lives.

14. An important role of instructors is to facilitate empathy, because empathy itself is not "biased" or "slanted" or "anti-intellectual." Instructors can encourage empathy through teaching students what changes in our disciplines and in the world, and how these changes happen, and to allow them to evaluate why they happen. And instructors can help students see ways that things might still change, and to judge what they might wish to see change.

15. Students ought to encounter cultures different from their own, so that there is less misunderstanding, fear, and distrust of other cultures and peoples.

16. Liberal education ought to teach people to tolerate and appreciate other cultures, yet be critical (i.e., appreciate human diversity, but not let that be an excuse for relativism).

17. Students need a much stronger critical understanding of what race is and how it operates. They need to understand various perspectives on race, and how many of them materialize in racist discourse. In addition, they need a stronger understanding of whiteness as an ethnicity, focusing on the implications of the invisibility of whiteness.

### **Roles of, and Ways toward, Liberal Education**

1. Liberal education ought to teach great books and works of art, philosophy, and social thought.

2. Liberal education ought to teach people how to grow throughout their lives – there's a lot of evidence that people stop reading and learning after high school or college.

3. It is not wise to search out and define specific topics that will be ideal for everyone to study in college.

4. Each degree program ought to provide opportunities for students to gain experience critically analyzing and evaluating arguments and evidence.

5. The ability to reason (and when called for to be rational-as Stephen Toulmin has pointed out they are not the same thing), to be literate and numerate, and to have some knowledge in common about persons and societies, that is, about the world in which we live, are all important in an education, both formal and that which continues for a lifetime. From the standpoint of a collegiate education (as part of what Clark Kerr has designated the "multiversity") the collection of syllabi must comprise a curriculum that addresses these aims and goals. Unfortunately, these goals are rarely met, especially in most large research universities. The curriculum comprises a series of compromises among disciplines, departments, and "interests," that stretch back over many decades.

6. Liberal education ought to lead students to reflect critically on knowledge of the several arts and

sciences that are important to living a life as a member of various overlapping groups and in society as a whole. Such education ought to help students to consider questions such as: What obligations does one have as a member of a democratic society to its preservation and improvement? and, as Kant famously asked: What does it mean to be human?

The several arts, humanities, and sciences attempt to address these goals, but the results of their research, in and of itself, does not constitute a curriculum. Study and understanding of the ways in which they contribute to knowledge - their organization, methods, and principles and the ways in which they form judgments -- in addition to what they present as knowledge can contribute to a coherent curriculum for undergraduates. We should not teach specifically "critical thought" except as it is embodied in the broader process of questions and their answers that comprise the scholarly and research process. These "processes" should be on offer in any undergraduate curriculum. Moreover, they should be integrated within this curriculum.

7. Liberal education ought to help students to establish intellectual independence, to think for themselves. This is actually a fairly complex project as it involves helping them learn to think analytically and critically and gain the confidence to do this to solve problems both in class and in life. It also requires that they be made aware of where their ideas come from so that they can make a conscious decision about what to believe, and it involves helping them learn to deal with data, first by recognizing it and then by analyzing it in order to draw a conclusion or construct an argument.

8. Liberal education ought to help students to work with information and to know how to find it and evaluate it. This skill can be developed within the context of one's discipline, but is worth one's time only insofar as it is generalizable to other topics and to life. Undergraduates benefit little from memorizing data or formulae that are irrelevant to their interests and which they will immediately forget. They can look up an equation or define a word in 10 seconds on the web. They need to know what the equation can and cannot do or at least how to find out what it can and cannot do. To do this some memorization is necessary, but much less than most textbooks promote. This sort of "teaching" is cheap.

9. An ideal undergraduate education would address the "building-blocks" of ethics, rhetoric, and argumentation in a required course, something highly unlikely ever to materialize at IU, not least because it would be nearly impossible for anyone to teach such a course without being labeled as a proselytizer of one persuasion or another. Still, something as simple as a more frequent use of these terms in brief discussions about "why we do what we do in this course and what you will learn here," and analysis of the ethical, rhetorical and argumentative components of any given issue or problem, would increase student awareness of these systems, give them the vocabulary with which to analyze and assess them, and perhaps encourage them to pay more attention to their own development.

10. There is lots of talk about "critical thinking," but few students and few teachers have defined just what this consists of and why it is important. The meaning and value of critical thinking need to be dealt with BEFORE one starts addressing issues and assertions: otherwise you end up with a discussion driven by uncritical statements and unconsidered opinions-- and even worse, a group of students trained to think that's what discussion should be.

### **Learning to Think Quantitatively and Scientifically**

1. It's important that students learn to think quantitatively. This does not mean that everyone has to take calculus and be able to do partial derivatives. It does mean that we ought to understand portions, amounts, orders of magnitude, linearity versus logarithmic increases and decreases. This quantitative

thinking is important in any business, in politics, and in extrapolating into the future (or into the past-see below).

2. It's important for students to know where and how to find accurate scientific information. Students also need to know the importance of finding such information when they need it.

3. It's important to teach the scientific method: clear testable hypotheses about any topic as a way to clarify their thoughts, verifiable arguments as a means of objective evaluation, humility about what we can know and what the limitations on the truth of any proposition are for human beings, responsibility for their ideas and the actions that they take based on them.

4. It's important for students to learn to evaluate scientific findings themselves.

5. Both in the context of the "science-religion debate" and in general, people need to think clearly about the goals, methods, and claims of science.

### **Learning a Foreign Language**

1. Liberal education ought to teach foreign languages in a way to be well learned.

2. Students should be required to learn a language other than English, not necessarily for its "cash value" in their future employment but because it requires them to look at the familiar and taken-for-granted in a new way.

### **Learning about Religion**

1. People need to be able to think clearly about religion, identify core claims and distinguish them from less-essential trappings, etc. This is often threatening, both to adherents of the religion being examined and to others (adherents of different religions or those who do not identify with any). Put bluntly, there is an awful lot of third-grade level of understanding of religion out there, among both supporters and non-supporters of any particular tradition.