

Interview with Christine Schutz, Associate Professor/Director of the Library

What are the values of a liberal arts education that you see as most important?

A critical habit of mind, intercultural competence, a respect for the process of inquiry, social responsibility, ethical judgement, lifelong learning, independence, curiosity, reflection (lions, tigers, bears), oh my...how to choose the most important among these and more? Certainly the value I cherish most when I see it enacted (my perspective in the library) is that of the acceptance and understanding of complexity and ambiguity. I enjoy – perhaps I am cruel that way? - watching students fall into the deep end to discover the multiplicity of shades beyond black and white, or red or blue and then swim their way to the service, untangling their own thoughts and those of the discipline, new idea in hand (or on screen).

How does the kind of educational experience offered at C of I prepare our students for the next phases of their lives?

College of Idaho graduates know how to learn. They know how to think, so they need never stop growing and changing. They bring flexibility and adaptability and creativity to the workplace, to anywhere.

What are the hallmarks of our small college experience?

Students are individuals here, individuals who know each other and know us (the faculty and staff) and really have the opportunity to be seen and heard. I attended a very large university myself. I used the library a lot but never interacted meaningfully with any member of the library staff. Here, I know students' names and they know mine. I am sure it is the same way in other offices on campus. Here, no one is nameless, there really isn't much opportunity to not be seen, to not engage.

What are the fundamental challenges for the liberal arts college in the 21st century?

How to “sell” a liberal arts education to students and families that want to be certain of employability upon graduation, who question the utility of Shakespeare or Chinese history for the student who wants to go into medicine or work in business or at a technology company. A look at the problems facing these students – the environmental, social, economic, and cultural impact of climate change, for example, or the intertwined questions of mental health care, gun control, and personal freedom that have recently been in the news so frequently, provides one answer. No one discipline can tackle such problems on its own. These issues have social, political, scientific, and ethical dimensions and can only be addressed by solutions that take all of these approaches into account. A liberal arts education teaches you not what to think but how to think. Liberal arts graduates can grapple best with complexity, diversity and change. Another answer is simply this: A liberal arts education makes you interesting and the world can use interesting people.

Where does your discipline fit in the continuum of the C of I educational experience?

The library is a crossroads, we're at the intersection of information, learning, and technology, and that of existing knowledge and new discovery. This is – sometimes (the best of times) – where it all comes together, where a search in the primary scientific literature turns up a new area of study for the lab or the field, where a trove of primary documents suggests a new interpretation of a historical event, where an online image collection inspires an art project or a direction for theatrical costume design. The library is where students can find fuel for their curiosity, where they can take what they have learned in the classroom or the lab one step further, and where they can follow that intellectual tangent or maybe forge an entirely new path. Or perhaps just find a good book.

Interview with Jim Dull, Physics Professor, Health and Human Performance Adjunct

What are the values of a liberal arts education that you see as most important?

Learning is part of living and not simply a short term goal to achieve monetary success.

Learning is exciting. It is more than a collection of facts or ideas. Create, implement, iterate!

The importance of creativity/imagination in all aspects of learning and working. The ability to use ideas from disparate fields to achieve a “solution” is a direct benefit of the liberal arts.

How does the kind of educational experience offered at C of I prepare our students for the next phases of their lives?

C of I does a great job teaching/training students to think on their own. The curriculum and the teaching at C of I are very successful at providing students with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and their creativity.

We also do a good job of getting the most from our students, and letting them see their own development. It is not just a matter of demanding excellence from the students. I like to think excellence is assumed – an axiom. It is the manner by which we get that excellence. It is the “close interaction” between students and faculty. These non-classroom interactions demonstrate a committed faculty AND a focused student body. They want to learn and we want to teach. If either group loses those desires the experiment that is The College of Idaho fails.

What are the hallmarks of our small college experience?

See above. The process of preparing students for the next phase of their lives (I would argue all phases) is the small college experience. It is exactly what you often don't get from a larger institution.

What are the fundamental challenges for the liberal arts college in the 21st century?

There are three factors, all related, that require liberal arts colleges to adapt (quickly): spiraling costs, competition from online and dual-enrollment programs, and a population that increasingly wants job training. Liberal arts colleges have responded in many different ways. Some have been successful, others not so much. I believe if liberal arts colleges can convince students and their parents that a liberal arts education is valuable and marketable the other problems will solve themselves. I don't know how we do that without evidence. So we must develop ways to collect data that demonstrates the value of a liberal arts education. This is called assessment.

Where does your discipline fit in the continuum of the C of I educational experience?

Physics and astronomy are integral to a liberal arts education. These fields ask students to consider the biggest and the smallest physical phenomena, and use their imaginations to evaluate our understanding of the physical world. I see these fields of study as fundamental to a liberal arts education. However, at C of I and most other institutions, these courses are often seen as service courses or one-stop classes that satisfy a small part of a larger, non-physics program. I would love to have the opportunity to convince more of our students that a background in physics helps them to better understand chemistry, biology, environmental science, and even music.

Interview with Sue Schaper, English Professor, former Faculty President

What are the values of a liberal arts education that you see as most important?

I think the exposure to a breadth of ideas and modes of inquiry extends people beyond comfortable perimeters of simplistic, deceptive unities. Skeptics suggest that a liberal arts education is careless and wasteful, unnecessarily complicating the curriculum by requiring students to taste fields of knowledge irrelevant to a first job. I would counter that a liberal arts education is farsighted and optimistic. We recognize and believe in our students' long-term potential to be thoughtful, active, creative forces in their personal, professional, and civic worlds, and we provide them with an education that speaks to these calls and these ambitions.

How does the kind of educational experience offered at C of I prepare our students for the next phases of their lives?

Maya Angelou urged people to memorize poetry and hold it in preparation for the future, asserting that poetry provides clarity and sustenance in the face of inevitable uncertainty and dislocation. Angelou understood the necessity of establishing a foundation of sensitive and

honest thought. We can't predict our futures, but we can gather and store meaningful, expanding ideas and hold them in reserve for the right time.

What are the hallmarks of our small college experience?

Faculty at The College of Idaho are dedicated to their fields of inquiry and knowledge. We've all been creatively excited, challenged, and humbled. We realize that human experiences are plural, complex, mysterious, singular, and precious. When we initiate students into our fields, we are likely to share our personal enthusiasms, our epiphanies, and also our recognitions of the limitations of our chosen fields, and thus we direct students to amplify their understandings through other disciplines rather than doggedly insisting on the advantages of our own chosen fields. We realize that the challenges we face are multi-faceted, and we realize that disciplinary provincialism impoverishes us all.

What are the fundamental challenges for the liberal arts college in the 21st century?

A disconcerting defining feature of our time is a withdrawing into communities of the like-minded. Liberal arts colleges question the securities of enveloping oneself in a community of the like-minded; they urge us to extend ourselves into unfamiliar perspectives and new fields of knowledge. Liberal arts colleges offer a compassionate, imaginative, and yes, difficult, alternative to parochialism. As a result, liberal arts colleges can seem a little threatening and are subject to mistaken criticisms that they offer curricula which are incoherent or impractical.

Where does your discipline fit in the continuum of the C of I educational experience?

Literary studies are both individual and communal: they lead us into intense, intimate engagements with astonishing works of verbal art, and they summon us to understand the historical and cultural contexts from which these works emerged. Furthermore, the field of literary studies is particularly rich in modes of inquiry; therefore, we're adept at adjusting how we define and respond to questions because we've become well versed in handling a wide set of creative and intellectual tools.