**The Future of the Liberal Arts**

**Thursday, October 25, 2012**

**Present:** Tom Beyer, Erik Bleich, John Berninghausen, Pieter Broucke, James Davis, John Emerson, Hedya Klein, Matt Longman, Antonia Losano, Sarah McGowen, Caitlin Myers, Jonathan Miller-Lane, Jason Mittell, Pete Nelson, Linus Owens, Pete Schumer, Rebecca Tiger, Rich Wolfson, Pat Zupan

What is the value of a liberal arts education? How do we measure that?

* It offers a framework for broad, interdisciplinary discussions.
* It’s exciting when students bring what they’ve learned in other disciplines to the classroom.
* Anecdote: RW started at MIT and finished at Swarthmore. The physics grads in his class at Swarthmore are more accomplished than those at MIT.
* One first-year student keeps asking, “What are we learning?” Trying to demonstrate that it provides a method of analysis.
* How can the cost of a liberal arts education be sustainable over the long term? (Some faculty question if they could afford to send their children to Middlebury.)

Who cares? What is the good a liberal arts education serves?

* Students have a high level of versatility and agility in navigating their futures.
* Preparing an intellectual elite
* Analyze and communicate data (quantitative and qualitative)
* Class advancement
* Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
* Protocols of inquiry
* Philosophical thinking: *What do I believe? Why do I believe what I believe? And what would it mean for me to believe something different?*
* Historical thinking
* Shared ways of thinking
* Seeks to answer, *What is the good life?*
* Small classes
* Faculty investment/engagement
* Communication skill development
* Few people find life-long employment at one place, so the job market requires flexibility. Workers evolve over time. “Heterogeneity of the future.”
* Helping students develop an understanding that not everything has a concrete answer.

Do students see liberal arts education as a risk (in terms of future living)? Which students can afford this risk? And are they right about the risk in the first place?

* Faculty should help articulate the value of the liberal arts.
* Parents strongly encourage students to think about the future.
* German gymnasia do what we do in college.
* This is not a luxury. 18-22 year-olds are too young to specialize.

We don’t need to be afraid of applied learning.

Middlebury is complicated—there are lots of programs (undergraduate, MIIS, MIL, etc.) Are we eating ourselves?

What are the goals?

* Developing a generation of engaged citizens encountering pluralistic society with questions and conflict
* We all seem to be chasing different missions in the undergraduate program alone.
* Middlebury has done well to adapt itself to a changing world.
* Incorporating technology into the classroom to bring learning outside of the classroom. Can course meeting schedule structures be broken down? Can we inspire a life of active engagement by showing that learning doesn’t just happen in the classroom?
* Flip side: There is a value to boundaries of the classroom and professor/students. Sometimes the community can be stifling.
* Do we need to identify a common pool of knowledge?
* Re: experiential learning: we don’t all have disciplines that allow students to make things
* *Home sapien* vs. *homo faber* (Are they mutually exclusive?)
* We do liberal arts exceedingly well. Can we do it just as well with internships, service learning, etc.?
* Students learning in other modalities, even at elite institutions, wish for the liberal arts model at mid-career.