**Freedom With Purpose**

**Philosophy**

Education in the liberal arts is education for liberation. The term “liberal arts” derives from the Latin *artes liberales* and means, literally, the subjects of study appropriate to free persons. And the verb “to educate” means, in its Latin root, “to lead.” A liberal arts education, then, is one that leads out from small worlds into larger ones.

It leads us out from small, safe worlds into larger, more interesting ones by training in us a dissatisfaction with partial knowledge, with sloganeering, and with fixed ideologies. It instills in us instead an appreciation for the true complexity of things and a lifelong commitment to learning. A mind so trained respects facts, employs apt methods, and engages in creative problem solving. It examines alternatives; it does not fear tension or paradox. It welcomes the stubborn “misfit” fact that cracks open a too-small view and releases us into a wider play of thought. And it encounters this liberating openness in the vision of artists; in the venturesome thought of philosophers, theologians, and mathematicians; in the observation and experimentation of scientists; in the insights of social scientists; and in the experience of living in community.

A liberal arts education at a small, residential college frees us from isolation within ourselves into a community of learners and sharers, a community of discovery and collaboration in which we can grow as individuals in constructive engagement with others.

A liberal arts education frees us from a reliance upon received opinion into an achieved personal authority by training the skills of critical thought, sound research, and informed and reasoned debate. At Roanoke College this freedom grows out of a tradition of debating societies within a community of open discourse.

A liberal arts education frees us from entrapment within the conventions of our present place and time into a wider perspective that comprehends our own legacies, the breadth of human history, and the variety of human cultures. To support this work, Roanoke College commits itself to the work of building a diverse and tolerant college community.

A liberal arts education frees us from superficiality and distraction into the satisfactions of knowledge in depth, in which depth of learning leads to useful understanding—and to pleasure, wonder, and awe. At the same time, a liberal education frees us from mere specialization into a wider dialogue, in which depth of knowledge is shared and debated to clarify distinctions, to discover patterns, and to integrate human knowledge into an ever larger and more adequate view.

A liberal arts education engages ethics and questions of ultimate meaning. It does not offer pat moral answers. Instead, it provides the basis of all moral behavior—it helps us to imagine the reality of other lives. In matters of ethical living, it does not limit itself to the human, social world, but includes thoughtful consideration of our place within the natural world. At Roanoke College these inquiries are informed, in part, by a tradition of Lutheran education that encourages a dialogue between faith and learning.

Education in the liberal arts frees us from purposelessness into productive careers and lives of service, in which our work to discover what is good, true, and beautiful leads on to work for good in the world.

The effects of a liberal arts education—an education for liberation—are a love of learning, an openness within the vastness of what we do not know, and a desire to use what we do know in ethical living, engaged citizenship, and service for the general good. The broad aim of such an education, therefore, is to produce resourceful, informed, and responsible citizens.

**Principles**

At Roanoke College a liberal arts education prepares students for lives of freedom with purpose. The college aims to produce resourceful, informed, and responsible citizens prepared for productive careers and for leadership in community, with an understanding of community appropriate to American diversity and to the increasingly global experience of the 21st century. To that end, the college’s curricular and co-curricular programs together pursue the following goals:

1. Traditionally, the liberal arts are the skills of freedom. A liberal education at Roanoke College aims to produce **resourceful citizens** by developing these skills and habits of mind, including:

* the ability to read, listen, and observe carefully
* the ability to access information from disparate sources, to assess it appropriately, and to develop information into useful knowledge
* the ability to think critically, analytically, and creatively; to apply apt methods; to reason with rigor; and to use effective problem-solving skills
* the ability to use writing as a tool of thought and to communicate effectively in a variety of written and oral forms
* the ability to construct, understand, and evaluate arguments that use quantitative reasoning
* the ability to understand scientific discovery and to appraise it wisely; the ability to make judicious use of new technologies
* the ability to work independently and collaboratively and to participate in experiential learning.

1. Knowledge is essential to freedom. A liberal education at Roanoke College aims to produce **citizens informed** by:

* the cardinal achievements of human imagination as expressed in the arts and humanities, in the sciences, and in the social sciences
* depth of knowledge in at least one academic field of study, complemented by a breadth of experience across the traditional divisions of knowledge sufficient to enable integrative learning and thinking
* knowledge of the histories, values, and achievements of both western and non-western cultures in depth sufficient for the appreciation of disparate values and perspectives; this knowledge includes the cultural insight gained through language study
* knowledge of the values and histories that gave rise to liberal democracy in the United States and an understanding of contemporary issues from a variety of perspectives.

1. Freedom, according to Martin Luther, includes both “freedom from” varieties of oppression and “freedom for” service in community. A liberal arts education at Roanoke College aims to produce **responsible citizens** by cultivating in its students:

* a commitment to academic integrity and intellectual freedom
* a life-long commitment to learning and to using that learning in active engagement with others
* a sense of responsibility in which individual identity is honored within a diverse community characterized by mutual understanding and respect
* a commitment to engage in contemplation and reflection as a prelude to action, to make principled and ethical decisions, and to participate in deliberative public discourse
* a commitment to health in its largest sense: the physical and emotional well-being of self within a community that balances intellectual, ethical, spiritual, and personal growth
* a willingness to understand and respond to the needs and challenges of our time, both as individuals and as members of wide, inclusive communities
* a desire to contribute to the common good at Roanoke College, in the Roanoke Valley, and beyond.