



ENGLISH 204  
FINAL EXAM  
SPRING 2002-2003



Time Allowed: 3 Hours

**Directions:** Texts A & B both discuss the merits of a liberal arts degree as opposed to a more vocationally-oriented or specialized degree. Critique Text A, synthesizing information from B to support your thesis.

**Text A:**

**How to Make People Smaller Than They Are**  
by  
**Norman Cousins**

1. Three months ago in this space we wrote about the costly retreat from the humanities on all the levels of American education. Since that time, we have had occasions to visit a number of campuses and have been troubled to find that the general situation is even more serious than we had thought. It has become apparent to us that one of the biggest problems confronting American education today is the increasing vocationalization of our colleges and universities. Throughout the country, schools are under pressure to become job-training centers and employment agencies.
2. The pressure comes mainly from two sources. One is the growing determination of many citizens to reduce taxes—understandable and even commendable in itself, but irrational and irresponsible when connected to the reduction or dismantling of vital public services. The second source of pressure comes from parents and students who tend to scorn courses of study that do not teach people how to become attractive to employers in a rapidly tightening job market.
3. It is absurd to believe that the development of skills does not also require the systematic development of the human mind. Education is being measured more by the size of the benefits the individual can extract from society than by the extent to which the individual can come into possession of his or her full powers. The result is that the life-giving juices are in danger of being drained out of education.
4. Emphasis on “practicalities” is being characterized by the subordination of words to numbers. History is seen not as essential experience to be transmitted to new generations, but as abstractions that carry dank odors. Art is regarded as something that calls for indulgence or patronage and that has no place among the practical realities. Political science is viewed more as a specialized subject for people who want to go into politics than as an opportunity for citizens to develop a knowledgeable relationship with the systems by which human societies are



governed. Finally, literature and philosophy are assigned the role of add-ons—intellectual adomments that have nothing to do with “genuine” education.

5. Instead of trying to shrink the liberal arts, the American people ought to be putting pressure on colleges and universities to increase the ratio of the humanities to the sciences. Most serious studies of medical-school curricula in recent years have called attention to the stark gaps in liberal education of medical students. The experts agree that the schools shouldn't leave it up to students to close those gaps.
6. We must not make it appear, however, that nothing is being done. In the past decade, the National Endowment for the Humanities has been a prime mover in infusing the liberal arts into medical education and other specialized schools. During this past year alone, NEH has given 108 grants to medical schools and research organizations in the areas of ethics and human values. Some medical schools, like the one at Pennsylvania State University, have led the way in both the number and the depth of courses offered in the humanities. Penn State has been especially innovative in weaving literature and philosophy into the full medical course of study. It is ironical that the pressure against the humanities should be manifesting itself at precisely the time when so many medical schools are at long last moving in this direction.
7. The irony of the emphasis being placed on careers is that nothing is more valuable for anyone who has had a professional or vocational education than to be able to deal with abstractions or complexities, or to feel comfortable with subtleties of thought or language, or to think sequentially. The doctor who knows only disease is at a disadvantage alongside the doctor who knows at least as much about people as he does about pathological organisms. The lawyer who argues in court from a narrow legal base is no match for the lawyer who can connect legal precedents to historical experience and who employs wide-ranging parts. In all these respects, the liberal arts have much to offer. Just in terms of career preparation, therefore, a student is shortchanging himself by shortcutting the humanities.
8. But even if it could be demonstrated that the humanities contribute nothing directly to a job, they would still be an essential part of the educational equipment of any person who wants to come to terms with life. The humanities would be expendable only if human beings didn't have to make decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others; if the human past never existed or had nothing to tell us about the present; if thought processes were irrelevant to the achievement of purpose; if creativity was beyond the human mind and had nothing to do with the joy of living; if human relationships were random aspects of life; if human beings never had to cope with panic or pain, or if they never had to anticipate the connection between cause and effect; if all the mysteries of mind and nature were fully plumbed; and if no special demands arose from the accident of being born a human being instead of a hen and a hog.



9. Finally, there would be good reason to eliminate the humanities if a free society were not absolutely dependent on a functioning citizenry. If the main purpose of a university is job training, then the underlying philosophy of our government has little meaning. The debates that went into the making of American society concerned not just institutions or governing principles but the capacity of humans to sustain those institutions. Whatever the disagreements were over other issues at the American Constitutional Convention, the fundamental question sensed by everyone, a question that lay over the entire assembly, was whether the people themselves would understand what it meant to hold the ultimate power of society; and whether they had enough of a sense of history and destiny to know where they had been and where they ought to be going.
10. Jefferson was prouder of having been the founder of the University of Virginia than of having been President of the United States. He knew that the educated and developed mind was the best assurance that a political consent could be made to work—a system based on the informed consent of the governed. If this idea fails, then all the saved tax dollars in the world will not be enough to prevent the nation from turning on itself.

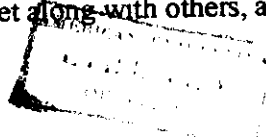
*INTEREST NOTE*

Norman Cousins worked as a writer and an editor. The piece "How to Make People Smaller Than They Are" originally appeared in 1978 in *Saturday Review*, a magazine edited by Cousins for over thirty years.

**TEXT B:**

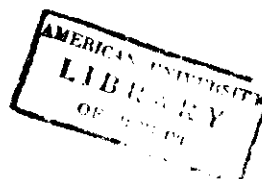
**The Practicality of the Liberal Arts Major**  
by  
**Debra Sikes and Barbara Murray**

1. Current trends indicate that by the year 2000 the average person will change careers at least twice during a lifetime. How does the entering college student prepare for career mobility which has never before been necessary? Our fathers decided what they wanted to do in life, which was very often what their fathers had done—went to college or apprenticed themselves, and pursued the same career until retirement. Our mothers assumed one of the nurturing roles in society, if they assumed a role outside of the home at all. Things have certainly changed. No longer is life so simple.
2. Adaptability and lifelong learning are now the cornerstones of success. What direction does a person take to prepare for a lifetime of change? The one degree which provides training which never becomes obsolete is the liberal arts degree; it teaches you how to think. It also teaches you how to read, write and speak intelligently, get along with others, and conceptualize problems. For the first time



in several decades, the liberal arts degree is coming to the forefront of the employment field.

3. Growing ranks of corporate executives are lamenting that college students are specialized too much and too early. What corporate America really needs, according to chief executive officers of major corporations, is students soundly grounded in the liberal arts—English, especially—who then can pick up one specific business or technical skills on the job. Few students, however, seem to be listening to this message. Today's best selling courses offer evidence that students want to take courses that provide direct job related skills rather than the most basic survival skills in the workplace: communication and thinking skills. They want courses they can parlay into jobs—and high paying ones at that. Certainly, we can understand this mentality when we consider trends indicating that this generation will be the first who will not be able to do better economically than their parents. They don't want to leave anything to chance. Historically, the liberal arts degree was good insurance for a poverty level existence. Students are looking to history to provide some answers it simply cannot give. They would do well to examine the present.
4. One of the big problems in the liberal arts community is that we do not market what we have to offer. Students very often fail to see the practicality of studying Shakespeare as preparation for a career in the business community. Perhaps some of us have locked ourselves in the ivory tower a little too long extolling the virtues of a liberal education as preparation for citizenship and life only to the neglect of it as preparation for career or careers. Education for education's sake is noble but impractical to today's college student who is facing a competitive and rapidly changing job market. They want and deserve to know how their courses will help them get a job. We as educators owe them some answers; we must be accountable not only for learning but also for providing information regarding the transferability of classroom skills into the workplace.
5. In an attempt to provide answers, we conducted a research project in the Dallas metroplex last year, assuming the role of the liberal arts graduate seeking employment in the fields of government, banking, business, and industry. Using informational interviewing as our method of job hunting and obtaining data, we conducted twenty-five interviews with a diversity of executive officers, ranging from personnel directors to the chairman of the board of an exclusive department store and the state governor. We wished to validate, through practical and current research, that not only does the liberal arts degree provide the best preparation for a lifetime of change, but it also provides a plethora of employment opportunities. We do not claim our research to be all encompassing, but we do feel its practicality was rewarding. We gathered data as to how the liberal arts major should present himself on paper and in person, where her best chances for employment are, and what he can do to augment the liberal arts degree. We were able to draw several conclusions as to how the liberal arts community could better prepare students for professional mobility.



### *The Liberal Arts Degree Is Marketable*

6. Ninety percent of those interviewed responded they would hire a liberal arts major for an entry level position which could lead to the executive suite if the position itself were not executive level. The chairman of the board of a major department store in Dallas responded to the question, "For what position would you hire a liberal arts graduate?" with a direct, "Any position in the company." When asked if a buyer wouldn't need to have special skills, he replied, "Taste is acquired or learned, and the liberal arts major could certainly learn this skill on the job." This interview is typical of the responses.

### *Skills Acquired with a Liberal Arts Background Are Most Desired by Employers*

7. We were not at all surprised to learn that the skills cited as the most desirable in an employee are those skills acquired from a liberal arts background. The cited skills are listed below in order of importance.
  - Oral communication
  - Written communication
  - Interpersonal
  - Analytical thinking
  - Critical thinking
  - Leadership\

Although these skills are not solely acquired through the mastery of an academic discipline, the discipline serves as a vehicle for developing or refining these skills.

### *Liberal Arts Majors Can Enhance Their Credentials*

8. Adaptability and lifelong learning are the cornerstones of success in today's complex and rapidly changing society. No longer can the person who is steeped in one academic discipline, but knows nothing about anything else, meet today's demands. Based on the data we accumulated, our recommendations for the liberal arts major are the following:
  - A basic knowledge of accounting
  - Computer literacy
  - Second major in a business field
  - Multiple minors
  - Advanced degree in another field

The key here is adaptability and diversity. Contrary to what most people believe, the higher a skill level an individual can claim, the more marketable he is. About those individuals who complain that they are "overeducated" we can only assume that they are marketing themselves on the wrong level. "Overeducation" is a term whose time will not come in the foreseeable future. The problem many individuals will face is a narrowness of education rather than "overeducation."

9. Unlike Aristotle who is believed to have known everything there was to know at the time he lived, it is impossible for us to deal with the voluminous amounts of



information which are produced daily. The lifelong learning which we have alluded to will not always be acquired through the traditional sixteen-week college course. We in the community college need to provide a smorgasbord of opportunities for individuals who wish to increase their mobility and options.

10. The time has come to rethink what education really is and how it relates to the functions of society. Perhaps what a liberal education does for an individual, which is more important than anything else, is to prepare him for more learning. The liberal arts background equips one with thinking skills; and those, coupled with the desire to learn, are the best preparation for career and life that any of us can possess.

Taken from Viewpoints, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, by W. Royce Adams

