



GUTENBERG COLLEGE

McKENZIE STUDY CENTER • ART PROJECT

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Why Gutenberg College?

by Gutenberg staff

Gutenberg College is the culmination of more than twenty years of thought and experience by the staff of McKenzie Study Center, founded in 1979 as a Christian ministry to Eugene-area college students. After years of teaching students to interpret and apply the Bible, the staff saw a need for giving students a broader education, one that would provide the learning skills essential to understanding the Bible and understanding life. Discussions among staff as to what would constitute such a program and, more generally, what would constitute a quality undergraduate education resulted in a program largely consonant with the "Great-Books" colleges. Thus, Gutenberg College was born—a classical, Great-Books college that seeks to foster a love for learning and a desire to follow the truth wherever it leads.

Great-Books colleges offer a broad-based liberal arts education with a curriculum centered around reading and discussing those writings which have been most significant in the formation of Western culture. Taken together, these writings constitute a "Great Conversation." Through several centuries of this extended conversation the most important issues facing mankind surface time after time: Who is man? Who is God? What is the relationship between them? How ought one live one's life? Studying the writings of the foremost thinkers of our culture gives students the opportunity to examine different perspectives on these important questions. In a sense, students learn at the feet of great thinkers.

Like other Great-Books colleges, then, Gutenberg College's curriculum centers around the discussion, in small groups, of these consequential works. In addition, the Gutenberg curriculum includes classes in math, science, and languages.

In an age when higher education is being thought of more and more as merely job training, why does Gutenberg College emphasize the liberal arts in the unique way that it does? The program at Gutenberg is based on three foundational assumptions:

- A good education seeks to promote skill, knowledge, and wisdom.
- A liberal arts education is truly practical.
- Education must be both objective and personal.

What follows is an explanation of how each of these assumptions plays a part in the education offered at Gutenberg College.

*A good education seeks to promote
skill, knowledge, and wisdom.*

In recent times education has become equated with preparation to make a good living. Education at Gutenberg College hearkens back to an earlier and more universal understanding: preparation to live a good life. Living a good life requires more than just knowledge or conformity to a societal expectation; it requires wisdom and understanding. A true education provides the tools to sort out that which is wise from that which is not; it gives those who want to make sense of life the learning skills they can apply to all fields of human knowledge. Consequently, an education worthy of the name focuses on (1) the development of sound learning skills, (2) the acquisition of a broad base of knowledge, and (3) the construction of a wise and well-considered worldview.

(1) Skill. Gutenberg seeks to develop in each student the skills of reading difficult material with understanding, writing clearly and persuasively, and thinking critically. Every aspect of the Gutenberg College curriculum keeps these important goals in mind. Students are expected to interpret and critique the works they read, to explain their understanding in a clear and rational way, and to write orderly, well-reasoned, and convincing papers. By teaching basic learning skills, Gutenberg College seeks to make students lifelong learners who are capable of dealing with a rapidly changing world.

Gutenberg emphasizes these thinking skills because the faculty do not share our culture's fashionable suspicion of reason, a suspicion shared by some non-Christians and some Christians alike. The Gutenberg faculty seek to model rational clarity and thoroughness in everything they do, including how they understand the Christian faith. God is, among other things, rational. Not only is God rational, but He is the ultimate source of all rationality. We humans were created to be rational in order that we might come to know and understand God Himself and the rationally ordered reality He created. The Gutenberg College faculty are confident that biblical Christianity is both completely true and eminently rational; they believe that rationality is the trustworthy servant of spirituality and not its enemy.

An essential component of any good education, therefore, will be the development and sharpening of our God-given reasoning ability. Becoming responsible and earnest seekers after truth through the pursuit of what is rationally compelling is an essential aspect of maturity.

(2) Knowledge. Knowledge, of course, is a primary goal of any college education. However, a liberal arts college like Gutenberg does not seek to impart the highly focused knowledge of the specialist. Knowledge is seen as the servant of understanding; it provides the raw materials that intellectual skill uses as it moves toward wisdom. Since truth is a consistent, coherent unity, knowledge from many different disciplines contributes to a person's understanding. One can benefit, for example, from the biologist, the philosopher, the artist, the economist, and the psychologist, who all have different perspectives on the human condition. A broad-based education that sufficiently acquaints students with the whole range of human knowledge equips them to explore any given field at greater depth, and thus it serves them well.

(3) Wisdom. The ultimate goal of the educated person is wisdom, an ability to see things as they truly are and to live in the light of that understanding. Gutenberg seeks to aid students as they begin the lifelong task of constructing a sound and coherent worldview. One's worldview—one's perspective on the nature of reality and the meaning of life—has implications for choices in all areas of life, such as career, family, and lifestyle. No one can escape making such choices, and no one can escape having a worldview out of which to make those choices. Gutenberg's distinctive education encourages students to build a coherent and accurate worldview, to pursue a knowledge of the purpose and nature of human existence and how that relates to God.

Because God, the author of all reality, is a moral being, an accurate worldview will have at its heart a moral vision. Gutenberg is very concerned with the moral development of its students. Such development does not come by imposing a large set of rules, but by challenging students to live in the light of their developing worldview. Gutenberg students work closely with each other, and this provides many opportunities for character development. Thus the ideas of the classroom cannot remain abstract and must be faced in the life of the community.

A liberal arts education is truly practical.

When people talk about an education being practical, they usually mean one that prepares a student to find a high-paying job easily. While acknowledging that employment is a practical issue, Gutenberg College stands for a broader and more realistic concept of practicality. The practicality of a thing is measured by its power to benefit or to harm. Gutenberg College resists the notion that the benefit of education is merely or even primarily financial.

As discussed above, the goals of the liberal arts education at Gutenberg College are a broad base of knowledge, a sharpened set of learning skills, and a more accurate and coherent worldview. The benefits of such things go far beyond the workplace. They certainly include the workplace, however. In a rapidly changing economy, employers are learning the drawbacks of specialization. They are searching for employees who can learn new things and adapt to new situations, who can communicate complex ideas, and who have the character and integrity to work effectively with others. The liberal arts education at Gutenberg College is exactly designed to foster such qualities.

Even more importantly, however, the combination of knowledge, skill, and wisdom which is the goal of Gutenberg College has the power to benefit the entirety of one's life. If today's workplace requires such qualities as adaptability, critical thinking, and integrity, how much more does the world in which we live demand them? One's well-being in such a world depends more on skill at living life than it does on one's job. Wealth and prestige in the hands of an uncritical, self-absorbed, and passion-driven person is no benefit. A liberal arts education is not a magic pill, and it is certainly not our savior, but it does promote attributes that have incredible power to affect the quality of our lives.

Education must be both objective and personal.

Gutenberg College is committed to the idea that there is an objective truth that can be known, rooted in the nature of God and His creation. Truth does not vary from person to person, but is a

fixed reality with which each person must come to terms. However, that process of wrestling with truth is very personal and subjective. Gutenberg College seeks to recognize both the objective nature of truth and the subjective nature of learning. Over the course of four years, students are exposed to the fundamental questions of life and the answers, good and bad, offered by our cultural heritage. Ultimately, however, students must formulate answers to these questions for themselves. In the process, the Gutenberg College faculty encourage students to pursue truth and reason wherever they might lead.

This recognition of the personal, subjective nature of true learning has led to two important aspects of the Gutenberg experience:

First, the Gutenberg College faculty are deeply committed to the Bible, believing it to be the inspired and inerrant word of God. As Protestant Christians, they are compelled by respect for the seriousness of life's issues to be advocates for what they believe to be true. At the same time, the faculty are firmly convinced that developing a sound and healthy worldview requires a non-coercive educational environment, and so teachers must grant students the freedom to reach their own conclusions. No student is required to subscribe to a particular doctrinal stance or to embrace a particular set of religious practices. The strength of the Christian worldview becomes most apparent when it can hold its own in the marketplace of ideas.

Second, the personal nature of learning suggests that apprenticeship is a better model for education than is lecturing. Socrates taught that speech-making is worthless as a means to imparting wisdom; speech-making is for entertainment, not education. Agreeing with Socrates, the faculty at Gutenberg College believe that learning, like most skills, is best accomplished by doing. Apprenticeship has long been used to pass important skills from one generation to the next. A less skilled student learns under the guidance of one who has more mastery of an art; the novice observes the master at work, practices the art himself, and receives instruction from the more skilled. This is the model adopted in the Gutenberg College curriculum. Consequently, lectures are few and small group discussions are standard fare. Students are encouraged to dialogue critically with the texts they read, with their fellow students, and with their tutors. Through person-to-person conversation about important and vital issues, deep and lasting understanding can result.

At Gutenberg College, then, education is a means to an end. The goal is mature adults who know how to live well—people who have carefully crafted a sound worldview and have acquired the knowledge and skills to live productive and constructive lives.

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