

FIND FREEDOM

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As I began planning this essay I realized that a lot of my ideals are going to echo Geneva College's fundamental beliefs and values. I write this essay not to simply regurgitate what I believe Geneva's core curriculum admires but to exemplify what Geneva has taught me in this first semester. Since arriving on campus, the world I once deemed as small has grown exponentially. Coming from a public and secular high school, I considered many other options than the private liberal arts college I now call my home. Looking back, I tend to question what drew me in and sealed the deal. Was it because my Christian background and Geneva's beliefs aligned? Was it because it was the first college that accepted me? Was it because my admissions counselor actually made me feel like I could add value to Geneva? After spending a semester here, the answer has finally been revealed to me. The education that a liberal arts college provides, as Wilfred McClay puts it, is "a preparation for *freedom*, for liberty in the fullest sense of the term."¹ This freedom represents us finding refuge in the world that we already live in and wanting to change it for the better. Geneva College has exposed me to this freedom, just as many other liberal educations do, which is what I claim to be what led me here in the first place. Colleges can help students to achieve this kind of freedom by addressing the bigger topics in life, incorporating the gospel, and fostering a deep appreciation to serve others. However, the primary threats to achieving this freedom are individuals whose sole purpose for college is monetary gain and an escape from reality.

As I mentioned before, I come from a public and secular high school. This caused me to not truly understand the word "humanities" until my freshman year of college. However, I believe that if colleges make courses like these a part of their core curriculum, it can aid students in achieving this freedom that McClay describes. Courses like humanities, philosophy, and political science can encourage "deep learning," as Ken Bain defines.

Students who are deep learners "[want] to understand the meaning behind the text and to think about its implications and application, to search for arguments, and to distinguish between supporting evidence and conclusions."² Courses like these foster deep learning, as topics are addressed that might otherwise be kept private or internal, such as death, love, entombment, nihilism, etc. There is no simple memorization in these studies, so one must seriously think about and engage these issues. Those that question the true meaning of "ideals, meaning, character, self

¹ Wilfred M. McClay, "Escaping the Matrix: The Case for the Liberal Arts," *The Hedgehog Review* 17:3 (Fall 2015), 121.

² Ken Bain, *What the Best College Students Do* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 36.

and soul” will find more peace in life and understand our human nature in the process.³ Colleges can equip their students to tackle the larger problems of life, showcasing a deep desire to understand the complexity of the human being. If we understand ourselves, we can benefit each other in the long run.

While addressing life-changing topics such as death and love are important, it is equally if not more important to incorporate the gospel into student life to achieve freedom. We know that Christ is light, so incorporating Him into college life is fundamental for “life” to spread and ultimately provide a sense of beauty in the world. Christian education nurtures Christian relationships, as demonstrated by “The Groen Club,” a study club in which individuals discuss different topics through the lens of Christianity. Each of the members has a desire to “develop a Christian approach to [their] chosen field of study.”⁴ Those that spend time engaging in a Christian worldview with others are more prone to recognize that they have a higher purpose or calling in life, cementing them in the world and allowing them to take it on in its fullest form. This grasp on purpose is similar to the metaphor Annie Dillard uses in “Living Like Weasels.” She uses the mindless, eternal method in which weasels bite their prey to say we should “grasp [our] one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes [us].”⁵ This is the mentality that our purpose in Christ gives us, to further our passions and never let go of them, with Him in mind. Thus, it is possible that a college that incorporates Christian values will allow individuals to ultimately find their purpose in the Lord, which is ultimately the truest freedom there is.

Finding purpose in the Lord allows us to recognize that we need to love one another. In other words, we need to *serve* those around us. To obtain the freedom that McClay describes, I believe that college needs to foster a deep appreciation to serve others. College should humble its students and create a deep desire to help others. As Wendell Berry puts it, “Education in the true sense, of course, is an enablement to *serve*—both the living human community in its natural household or neighborhood and the precious cultural possessions that the living community inherits or should inherit.”⁶ It seems justified that colleges should not promote themselves as the golden ticket to wealth but rather as an opportunity to become true “public servants,” to care for and defend those around us for the greater good and common interest. In serving others, real and true satisfaction is obtained. Individuals feel more at home and recognize the beauty of their local world, recognizing that they have the *freedom* to serve.

³ Jackson Lears, “A Place and Time Apart: The Liberal Arts Versus Neo-Liberalism,” *Commonweal* 142:8 (1 May 2015), 14.

⁴ Harry Van Belle, “The Start of a Cultural Movement: ‘The Groen Club,’” *Comment* (Fall 2010); accessed online at <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/communities-enduring-beyond-school/>.

⁵ Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 70.

⁶ Wendell Berry, *Home Economics* (New York: North Point Press, 1987), 52.

Of course, colleges can only do so much to help their students achieve this kind of freedom. I believe that it is primarily up to the student to choose to take hold of these opportunities. Thus, I believe the primary threats to obtaining this kind of freedom are the individuals' mentalities regarding college. Some believe, for instance, that the sole purpose for college is monetary gain. I refer to this as the "get in and get out" mentality. They are exclusively pursuing college for a degree and ultimately a high-paying job. In essence, they "tune out" and "shut their minds off" from any intellectual type of thinking—that is, any further or "deeper learning" that I mentioned previously. Instead of deep learners, these individuals become "strategic" learners who "primarily intend simply to make good grades, often for the sake of graduate or professional school. . . . In many ways, they look like deep learners, but their fundamental concern is different."⁷ Their basis for concern is to achieve things that society deems as the most important, such as a six-figure salary or an expensive vehicle. Thinking this way breaks them off from the opportunity to grasp anything deeper than surface level, rendering them unable to obtain a deeper sense of freedom.

Furthermore, I believe that individuals who go to college for an escape from reality will not obtain the true sense of freedom that McClay defines. College students tend to think that they will find their freedom in partying or having sex, only to feel the hollowness and brokenness of nihilism. They will always be searching for something, unable to locate what will fulfill them. They have a false sense of "escape" in their mind, just as Poppy Lopez has in *The First Year Out*. He cemented himself in the party scene, drinking and smoking to "feel good." His "primary focus was managing his own life: what made him happy, who his friends were, and how to live with little supervision from adults."⁸ On the contrary, real escape is observing the world around oneself, taking it slow and analyzing the deeper aspects of life. It is recognizing the beauty in all things and wanting to grow with it. Mixing up these notions can prove detrimental, as it can eliminate all possibilities of a willingness to obtain true freedom that some colleges have to offer.

In conclusion, I believe that it is necessary that colleges provide opportunities for their students to achieve a true liberal education that allows them to understand the beauty of the world and move in it. Ideas such as courses that teach fundamental concepts, an incorporation of Christian life on campus, and an emphasis of serving others can all provide students with the adequate tools to benefit themselves and achieve a true sense of freedom in college. However, the biggest downfall in achieving this freedom are the individuals themselves. We tend to be self-interested and self-fulfilling individuals, sometimes placing our values in the wrong places. If we examine ourselves and our tendencies, we may be able to find real freedom during our short four-year journey.

⁷ Bain, 36.

⁸ Tim Clydesdale, *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 14.