

## From Monet to Galileo: Exploring the Universe through Liberal Arts

Ever since I was young, I was fascinated with the different facets of education. It didn't seem enough to learn only what I needed to become a surgeon, a chemist, or a designer - I wanted to deeply understand the world, in all its versatile splendor. So when I arrived at college, I declared to myself that, every quarter, I would take a class in a subject I had never studied before.

This might seem like a minor decision, but it was possibly the best thing I could have done. I was astonished at how much there was to know, as I learned about racial justice in Art History, epistemology in Philosophy, behavior in Neurobiology, modern wars in Political Science, and ASCII in Programming.

As I pored over my beautifully diverse textbooks, I realized that it was possible to dedicate my college education to more than just one department. I could study *everything* I was passionate about - a liberating concept to a teenager who didn't quite know what she wanted to do. I was free to tailor my liberal arts degree, exploring new subjects and ultimately discovering the topics I found most exciting.

For me, the perfect educational combination turned out to be art and neurobiology. As a molecular biology major, I now work in a neurobiology laboratory, regularly presenting my work at events such as SICB annual meetings. And as a part-time graphic designer, I run an art outreach program for low-income Seattle schools, and am even co-teaching a university class on art education.

Without this eclectic mix of classes, I would have never found my passion for behavioral neurobiology, or realized that I find so much happiness in art education. A

liberal arts education really is the best way to learn more about the world while in college, and consequently, to discover ourselves as people, students, and community members.

My varied classes also gave me amazing opportunities for work and volunteerism. I met doctors, musicians, teachers, and scientists, with life goals very different from my own. From them I learned to reflect critically on my choices, in light of the different aspirations and morals I recognized in each person.

And most importantly, my liberal arts education gave me important tools for life outside of college. Almost any job requires a medley of several disciplines: researchers need to write concise papers to communicate their work, or create anatomical diagrams. Designers need to market their work by coding websites, and use statistics to optimize production and sales. I was lucky enough to learn many of these skills during the past three years.

Although I started college believing that my “extra classes every quarter” were merely a fun diversion, I realized that they really weren’t “extras” after all. I was learning to solve important problems, to understand people from extremely diverse backgrounds, and to express my ideas in anything from writing to painting to HTML code. I was learning from the best teacher there is: a liberal arts education.