

The Value of Perspective

Beth McFadden // Whitworth University

I first came to Whitworth with the intention of getting out in two years, *wasting* as few credits as possible on general classes, and transferring to nursing school as soon as I was qualified. I was adamant about getting a ‘practical’ degree, as I thought this was the most effective way I could ‘help’ people. However, when I arrived at Whitworth, I discovered how infectious the love of learning is. In my current position, as a graduating senior, I mourn the fact that I can only fit two majors into my four years here; this is not because I wish to impress the world with how many credits I can bury myself in, but because I am convinced that diversity and quality of knowledge are undeniably valuable and applicable, especially in the context of understanding and helping others.

One of the communities that matters most to me is the West Central neighborhood in Spokane. I had the opportunity of spending two full summers working there, and have spent the last couple years volunteering within the neighborhood. The most obvious issue plaguing this community is poverty; as one of the poorest neighborhoods in Spokane, West Central represents the collision of numerous complex issues. It is in the face of this complexity that proficiency in ethics, epidemiology, law, art, and theology, communication, philosophy, politics, and psychology touch ground and color reality.

Because of my liberal education, I do not see this beloved neighborhood unilaterally. West Central is not merely a political example of the welfare system in action—for better or for worse. Nor is the neighborhood a psychological case study depicting the reality of generational patterns and the expression of varied levels of mental health. Instead, when I look at West Central, I see both the brokenness of our political system *and* the broken self-esteem of parents who are chemically ruled by addiction. Likewise, I recognize quantifiable health disparities

alongside a thriving community culture of art and honesty. Though I am trained to recognize food deserts and crime rates in communities, I have also been taught to notice rituals and ethics that drive communication and integrity among community members. A poor neighborhood can no longer be solely recognized as an epicenter of high rates of drug abuse or low levels of education, but *must* take on a more complex and less prejudiced label when diverse perspectives are applied to it's identity. Similarly, skills such as culturally sensitive communication, grant writing and research, leadership or psychological training and expertise in medicine are often used effectively in tandem with one another, and are proven insufficient if employed alone.

Thus, liberal education forms citizens who can recognize and respond to the multifactorial nature of problems without arrogantly boiling those issues down to a digestible volume. Ironically, the liberal arts are often paraded condescendingly, when the real power of this form of education lies in its ability to foster humility and effective action in the face of exceedingly complex issues.