

Survey of Student Engagement”, which was conducted at 50 universities and colleges in the U.S., showed that about 12 percent of professors said they had used videoconferencing (webcam instruction) in their teaching” (Young, January 30, 2011). Even with the pervasiveness of the technology on U.S. campuses and the freedom of faculty to incorporate new teaching methods in the classroom these are relatively low participation numbers. It appears that incorporating webcam instruction into the structure of the classroom lesson is still being developed in universities throughout the world. This means that universities in Vietnam could still become leading innovators of this instructional application and thereby set the operating standards for the rest of the world to follow●

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“They will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful, and they will require that the beautiful should be useful.”

The Value of Social Sciences and Humanities Programs

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A recent online newspaper report indicated that the number of graduating high school students in Vietnam who are registering to take the entry exam (C group) for Social Sciences and Humanities has been in rapid decline. The online newspaper’s headline, Social Sciences Not Attractive to Students (Vietnam. Net Bridge, 12/01/2011), is a simplistic but accurate indication that “Excellent students now do not want to study social science majors, leaving schools unable to enroll enough students” (Vietnam. Net Bridge, 12/01/2011). This trend of declining enrollments in social sciences and humanities programs may be the consequence of a perception that these areas of study are not adequate preparation

with which to secure future career opportunities in Vietnam. Is such a perception an accurate indicator of the career value of a social science/humanities major? (The following chart provides a sample listing of major areas of study in the humanities and social sciences.)

There are many universities in the United States which have historically been associated with the teaching of humanities and social sciences leading toward an undergraduate degree in liberal arts. There are also many universities in the US which are well known for their scientific research and business education programs, but yet they still are offering well recognized programs in the humanities and social sciences. Even though a liberal arts undergraduate degree has also been declining in popularity in the US, numerous universities, through department offerings and general education requirements, are championing the cause of liberal arts education. A simple example

Humanities (a key part of a liberal education which seeks answers to the human condition through critical analysis)	Social Sciences (a branch of science which examines elements related to the individual within society and society as a distinct unit)
Classics	Anthropology
History	Communication Studies
Languages	Economics
Literature	English
Music	Journalism
Philosophy	Political Science
Theatre	Psychology

in regards to the importance of social science and humanities programs are the following two program descriptions from Carnegie Mellon University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

“The College of Humanities and Social Sciences (H&SS) at Carnegie Mellon University is no ordinary liberal arts school. H&SS students publish poetry and analyze brain scans. They teach elementary school students to speak Spanish and create computer tutors that teach algebra. They study how films shape our culture and learn about the impact that pollution has had on the history of American cities.” (<http://www.hss.cmu.edu/>)

“The great strength of MIT lies not only in the fact that it fosters creativity and innovation in science and technology, but that it also pioneers in exploring the social and cultural environments in which science and technology are produced... every undergraduate at MIT is exposed to a wide range of interpretive and analytic approaches in the humanities, arts, and social sciences.” <http://web.mit.edu/catalog/degreet/human.deans.html>

The value of a liberal arts education (comprised of humanities and social science courses) appears to be focused upon the development of broad-based higher learning skills which open the intellectual capacity of the individual. “An education in the humanities allows one to develop skills in reading, writing, reflection, and interpretation that are highly prized in our economy and culture...the humanities teach elements of mind and heart that you will draw upon for decades of innovative and focused work” (Roth, January 20, 2011). Coursework in the humanities and social sciences are also credited with helping to develop an individuals critical thinking skills. “A common way to show that one has sharpened one’s critical thinking is to display an ability to see through or undermine statements made by (or beliefs held by) others” (Roth, January 20, 2011). But do increased skills in critical thinking, reading, writing, reflection and interpretation possess enough occupational value to popularize a liberal arts education in a country such as Vietnam?

This question is currently being asked in Western

institutions of higher education especially those in the United States. Several years ago the former president of Harvard University, Derek Bok, wrote a critical evaluation of the US higher educational establishment in his book *Our Underachieving Colleges*. As part of the focus on underachieving universities and colleges, Dr. Bok reviewed the recent transition from educating students for life to educating students for work. Quoting former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch, it was noted that “American higher education has remade itself into a vast job-training program in which the liberal arts are no longer central” (Bok, 2006, p. 3). This concern has stimulated a few schools and educational organizations to review the role that humanities and social sciences, the main components in a liberal arts education, could play in student’s employment and/or career opportunities.

The efficacy of a liberal arts education is generally related to the occupational goal that has been established by the undergraduate student. “Undergraduates who plan to move directly into a highly specialized or technical career had best enroll in vocational programs” (Bok, 2006, p. 294). “On the other hand, students who expect to take a professional degree in law or medicine will be well advised to follow a liberal arts program in college and leave their vocational training for later” (Bok, 2006, p. 295). For those students who are thinking of obtaining a top management career in business or industry without benefit of

an MBA, “neither liberal arts nor vocational majors have an advantage” (Bok, 2006, p. 295). A vocational major in higher education, as referenced by Dr. Bok, is generally categorized as a major in business, engineering and technology.

Studies which have examined the educational pathway to career have shown that the specific major area of study in which an undergraduate pursues will effect the type of position they will eventually hold in business. “Management and engineering majors tend to gravitate toward careers in accounting, production and finance. Their comparative advantage seems to lie in manufacturing companies. Liberal arts majors are more likely to specialize in marketing, human resources, or public affairs and to move into companies in the service sector” (Bok, 2006, pp. 295-296). The future needs of business and industry are a constantly evolving discussion, but it does seem probable that the advancement of technology will demand greater undergraduate preparation in related fields of study. In addition, the future needs of business and industry will likely require a greater emphasis upon communication, critical thinking and rapid learning--skills which are generally associated with a liberal arts education.

Recent trends in university enrollment have demonstrated that there are distinctive populations of students who are less inclined to participate in liberal arts studies. Less advantaged students as well as first generation attending students avoid a liberal arts education

in favor of more narrowly defined programs with a clear occupational focus. “According to a 2005 study by the National Center for Education Statistics, first-generation students are less likely than others to take courses in the humanities, foreign languages, the arts, or even computer science (Crutcher, Winter, 2011). These students are opting for an education that will prepare them for immediate access to well-paying employment rather than for an occupational path that may not be as clear.

In the fall of 2010 the state of Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board submitted a proposal to the governor that would fund university programs based upon graduation rates in high priority fields such as science, technology, engineering and math. This would result in fewer resources being provided for major areas of study in the humanities. The Texas response appears to be following a national enrollment trend in liberal arts courses. According to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, in 2007 only 8 percent of American undergraduates throughout the US majored in a humanities field, compared with 17 percent in 1966 (Reinstra, November 10, 2010). It is also interesting to note that in 1966 student activism at most university campuses in the US was very high with attention being devoted to the ending of poverty, caring for the environment and of course ending the war. In 2007 student activism is very limited with only pockets of attention being devoted to societal issues.

Perhaps there is a corollary between the popularity of social science/humanity majors with a greater interest in local and world events.

In a 2008 commentary, Graham Spanier, current president of Penn State University, examined the connection between student activism and the decline in popularity of a liberal arts education (humanities and social sciences) in the US (Spanier, 2008).

“In a sampling of those born between 1976 and 2000, the Pew Research Center found that 81% of respondents cited getting rich as their priority in life and 51% named fame as a top goal. Only 30% in the pool expressed a desire to help people in need, while 22% said they aspire to be community leaders. Compare that to the results of a survey of college freshmen in 1967: nearly 86% said that ‘a meaningful philosophy of life’ was their principal goal, while 41% cited being ‘well off financially’ as their purpose in life. One result of this shift has been that more of today’s students are pursuing degrees in professions that appear lucrative or glamorous: business, finance, public relations, or broadcasting, for example. There has been a slow but steady decline in liberal arts majors.”

It may be difficult to accurately extrapolate relevant comparisons from the data above and directly apply them to the declining interest in humanities and social sciences in Vietnam. But considering that many Western trends in higher education have found their way into the Vietnam classroom it might be

a reasonable assumption that undergraduates in both countries have similar motivations for a university education in 2011.

This discussion should be even more pertinent for those universities located in countries where there is combined pressure for economic growth and social improvement. A country needs entrepreneurs who know how to start successful enterprises, it needs astute managers who are knowledgeable in the ways of business, and it needs an assortment of skilled professionals who are able to elevate the technological, scientific and medical foundation of the country. But a vibrant and fiscally active country also needs university graduates who are able to contribute to the quality of life within a society by producing books, movies, art, and music. Ironically as business and industry, as well as society in general, is becoming more complex university education is becoming more focused and narrowly defined.

As noted in the opening paragraph, the best students in Vietnam have a diminished desire to enroll in humanities and social sciences courses and/or majors. The reasons for this lack of interest may be related to the global decline in liberal arts study in favor of vocational majors or the reasons may be unique to the educational experience in Vietnam. At the present time we have very little documented evidence which provides an explanation for current enrollment trends in Vietnam. By necessity anecdotal references and analysis of

related data are used to develop a theoretical rationale for student action. If the trend to devalue humanities and social science education were to continue unabated in Vietnam higher education, would this negatively effect the long-term occupational interests of current graduates? Will future graduates be able to offset knowledge limitations and negligible skill sets in critical thinking, foreign languages, communication, organizational psychology and economics (skills which are desired by employers in Vietnam)? A representative from a large recruiter in Vietnam echoed this concern by stating that "At the entry level, overseas students are sometimes more highly prized for certain sub-skills--such as presentation, team work and problem solving" ("Done in By Degrees," 2010). "That is why when recruiting for certain positions (in Vietnam), employers prefer foreign university graduates. Employers believe that those, who once studied in foreign countries, will be more open minded and can adapt to new jobs more easily" (Tu, 2010).

In addition to fulfilling workplace needs, studying humanities and social sciences produce individuals who have the ability to research and write about important societal issues. Issues which may not lead to personal economic outcomes but still provide valuable insights into the Vietnamese society. By reviewing an online compendium of current and historic research articles from the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), it is easy to compile

a sample listing of subject titles which were based upon humanities and/or social science perspectives within Vietnam. If humanities and social science programs were to be reduced and/or eliminated throughout the university system in Vietnam would these socially relevant studies still be produced?

"Child Poverty in Vietnam: Providing Insights Using a Country-Specific and Multidimensional Model"

"National Unity and Ethnic Identity in a Vietnamese University"

"Globalization and the Governance of Education in Viet Nam""Education and Inequalities in Rural Vietnam in the 1990's"

"Work and Family Roles of Women in Ho Chi Minh City"

"Doi Moi, Education and Identity Formation in Contemporary Vietnam"

"Development of a Scale to Measure Economic Status of Students in Rural Vietnam"

"Does Child Labor Decline with Improving Economic Status?"

The value of social sciences and humanities programs is a question that must continue to be examined throughout the educational infrastructure of higher education as well as within the board rooms of Vietnam's businesses and industry. Hopefully this review of the issue, with its assortment of related questions, will serve as a resource from which to focus the discussion. The perception that a liberal arts education (humanities and social science courses) has no career value is simplistic at best and erroneous at worst. In

addition, liberal arts graduates contribute value to the betterment of society through their civic contributions and examination of society's ills. Perhaps its not an either--or selection. Perhaps universities in Vietnam could educate their graduates in a way that provides a balance between personal occupational goals and communal interest in the social welfare of local communities and the nation●

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Thúc đẩy luồng thông tin...

(Tiếp theo trang 36)

- Bảo đảm tính minh bạch trong việc cung cấp thông tin về đầu tư góp vốn, hỗ trợ của nhà nước vào doanh nghiệp.

- Thực hiện nghiêm chỉnh nghĩa vụ công khai hoá và cung cấp thông tin của cơ quan công quyền đặc biệt là công khai trong hoạt động thanh tra, kiểm toán, xét duyệt dự án, cấp vốn ngân sách nhà nước, đăng ký kinh doanh....

- Liệt kê và công bố bằng văn bản một cách rõ ràng những loại thông tin không được phép công bố hoặc hạn chế công bố vì liên quan đến bí mật quốc gia, bí mật đời tư, bí mật kinh doanh hoặc thông tin trong hoạt động tố tụng mà việc công khai làm ảnh hưởng đến tiến trình hoặc kết quả giải quyết các vụ án.

- Qui định về các qui trình, thủ tục, thời hạn đáp ứng yêu cầu cung cấp thông tin của doanh nghiệp và cải tiến thủ tục tiếp nhận, thông báo, chuyển tiếp thông tin đến doanh nghiệp.

- Qui định cụ thể hình thức chế tài và xử phạt đối với các cơ quan công quyền và công chức nhà nước vi phạm các qui định về công khai thông tin cho doanh nghiệp. Ví dụ như hành vi cố tình trì hoãn việc cung cấp thông tin, làm sai lệch nội dung hồ sơ, tài liệu với mục đích cản trở việc tiếp cận thông tin, không cung cấp thông tin, ...

Tóm lại, việc tăng cường khả năng tiếp cận thông tin từ các cơ quan công quyền của doanh nghiệp khi thực hiện tái cấu trúc kinh tế sẽ đem lại lợi ích lớn cho các doanh nghiệp, góp phần xây dựng được môi trường kinh doanh cạnh tranh và công bằng trong nền kinh tế thị trường định hướng xã hội chủ nghĩa. Khi khả năng tiếp cận thông tin của doanh nghiệp được nâng cao việc kinh doanh sẽ hiệu quả hơn, "thúc đẩy luồng thông tin dịch chuyển giữa Chính phủ và khu vực kinh doanh, tối đa hoá tiềm năng cho sự phối hợp này"². Bên cạnh đó tăng cường khả năng tiếp cận thông tin của doanh nghiệp là một trong những biện pháp quan trọng góp phần thực thi Luật phòng chống tham nhũng năm 2005 và nhiều luật khác của nước ta●

Tài liệu tham khảo

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