



Faculty Senate Resolution
Supporting a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education
September 2020

Whereas the Metropolitan State University of Denver's mission is, "To provide a high-quality, accessible, enriching education that prepares students for successful careers, post-graduate education and lifelong learning in a multicultural, global and technological society. To fulfill its mission, MSU Denver's diverse university community engages the community at large in scholarly inquiry, creative activity and the application of knowledge." There is a strong consensus among educators and employers that every college should require broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences, regardless of a student's major. A liberal arts education, as commonly agreed, promotes critical thinking, communication and complex problem-solving using a variety of cross cultural, interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches – vital skills for an ever evolving and increasingly complex job market and the modern world. A liberal arts education and its focus on transferable skills help students prepare for jobs that don't exist yet. Thus, a broad-based liberal arts education is the foundation of MSU Denver's mission and an important part of what makes MSU Denver excellent. President Davidson has expressed this herself: "What we do better than almost any other university is offer a learning model that blends the academic and the practical, the technical skills with human skills;"¹

Whereas our students come from diverse backgrounds, many from first generation college households, many are black, brown, and indigenous people of color traditionally disadvantaged in US society, and many are eligible for Pell-grants. Historically, a liberal arts education was reserved for the economic and social elite, though this changed after the GI bill. There is a threat that this will be reversed if public Universities like MSU Denver move away from the liberal arts model. The skills of critical thinking, problem-solving and effective communication are needed in every career. Universities around the nation acknowledge the importance of a liberal arts education and continue to graduate top tier professionals who are equally effective humanitarians. If we do not deepen our conviction to provide a high-quality, accessible, enriching education, as stated in our mission, MSU Denver students will be at a disadvantage. Our students will not be able to remain competitive if we don't offer an education equal to that offered to the privileged and elite;

Whereas students are not simply workers. They are full human beings who have full lives. They are family members and global citizens who engage with their communities at multiple levels. A liberal arts education prepares our students for their full lives, as professionals and as community members, insofar as it fosters media literacy and creates a foundation of skills and empathetic leadership, including the "ability to think well

¹ <https://www.msudenver.edu/early-bird/2018/10/29-davidsons-desk.shtml>

about political issues affecting the nation, to examine, reflect, argue, and debate, deferring to neither tradition nor authority,”² along with the tools to research and question social structures leading to activism and societal change;

Whereas despite the fact that educational institutions including MSU Denver are divided into disciplines and departments, the complex problems of the world necessitate an interdisciplinary approach. Higher education financially incentivizes, through structures like FTEs, the further siloing of students’ educational experiences; and

Whereas liberal arts programs have become increasingly vulnerable nationwide as universities shift towards professional or technical degrees, and this vulnerability has been most recently amplified by the current pandemic and resulting budget crisis.

Now, therefore be it *Resolved*, that the MSU Denver Faculty Senate:

1. Recognizes that the liberal arts and sciences are the foundation of all undergraduate degrees, that all undergraduate degrees on campus are made stronger by a liberal arts education, and that the mission of MSU Denver cannot be accomplished without the liberal arts programs.
2. Affirms that all students, including our diverse and disadvantaged students, deserve the very best, well-rounded education MSU Denver can provide. A liberal arts education prepares students for lifelong learning and for successful employment in the jobs of the future.
3. Stands in solidarity with all liberal arts programs of MSU Denver that develop the habits of mind needed for robust community participation and a fulfilling life, and encourages individuals, programs, and offices to find ways to concretely support this resolution.
4. Encourages MSU Denver leadership to examine structures to incentivize interdisciplinary collaboration and to embrace concrete opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement beyond the General Studies requirements through policy initiatives that support interdisciplinary collaboration.
5. Urges MSU Denver leadership to support and value the existence of liberal arts programs at MSU Denver, even in budget crises, not only insofar as they offer General Studies courses, but also insofar as they provide choices of majors, minors, certificates, etc. to all students. In an environment where resources are increasingly scarce, we urge the institution to build more transparency into the process whereby resource allocation decisions are made with respect to not only traditional funding, but also marketing, personnel, grant support, business and community connections/outreach, etc. by increasing dialogue between faculty, staff, and the administration. We urge leadership to allocate resources and attention more equitably across programs.

² Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Society Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, 2016.