

The Crisis in the Humanities and its Relevance to Communication Studies

Brett Ingram

Communication Department
Boston College
brett.ingram@bc.edu

Lisa Cuklanz

Communication Department
Boston College
cuklanz@bc.edu

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Abstract

Contemporary pressures on institutions of higher learning, including economic pressures, a highly competitive "rankings" environment and critiques of the high cost of a university education, are making it increasingly more difficult to maintain a focus on intellectual values traditionally held by liberal arts colleges and universities. The field of Communication has some apparent advantages in the more market-driven higher education environment, with its potential focus on skills training and practical pre-professional education. However, we argue that these very elements mean, ironically, that the field should re-focus on what can contribute to the liberal arts traditions to which it belongs. To do otherwise, and to focus on skills while other disciplines do not do so, is to sell ourselves short and to play into criticisms of the Communication Studies as one lacking in depth, rigor, and intellectual challenge. In the end, the value of the degree is undercut if practical principles are accepted above intellectual values and goals. The article argues that the Communication departments situated in schools of liberal arts, arts and sciences, or humanistic studies must eschew emphasis on skills-based course work and refocus attention on our intellectual traditions.

Keywords: communication, skills, liberal arts, technology, crisis, humanities.

Resumen. *La crisis de las humanidades y su relevancia para los estudios de comunicación*

Las presiones del mundo contemporáneo que se imponen en las instituciones de enseñanza superior, que incluyen dificultades económicas, un sistema altamente competitivo de ranking y las críticas a los elevados costes de la educación universitaria, hacen cada vez más difícil mantener el enfoque en los valores intelectuales tradicionalmente ocupados por las universidades y los estudios de humanidades y ciencias sociales. El campo de la comunicación tiene algunas ventajas en el entorno de la educación superior impulsada por el mercado por su potencial foco en la capacitación y en la educación práctica profesional. Sin embargo, este artículo propone

que el campo debe volver a concentrar sus esfuerzos en aquello precisamente que puede contribuir a fomentar los valores de la tradición de las artes liberales a las que pertenece. Hacerlo de otra manera, y centrarse en las habilidades prácticas, es apostar por el corto plazo y dar pie a las críticas que acusan a estos estudios de carecer de profundidad, rigor y desafío intelectual. En último término, el valor del grado se verá socavado si los principios prácticos se anteponen a los valores intelectuales y objetivos. El artículo sostiene que los departamentos de comunicación situados en las universidades de artes liberales, ciencias sociales y humanidades deben evitar promover el tipo de trabajo basado en las habilidades prácticas y privilegiar, por el contrario, la atención a la tradición intelectual del campo.

Palabras clave: comunicación, habilidades, ciencias sociales y humanas, tecnología, humanidades, crisis.

1. Introduction

In Aristophanes' comedy *The Clouds*, a callow youth is enrolled in a new learning academy - derisively called The Thinkery - run by Socrates, who is presented as a pompous, amoral blowhard. The curriculum at The Thinkery emphasizes skepticism towards entrenched modes of thought, the construction and delivery of persuasive arguments, and philosophical contemplation. The students there are pale, sunken-chested, and engaged in intellectual exercises that have no readily apparent practical utility. Socrates boasts that he can turn the boy into a philosopher, and in time the student will look the part as well, establishing the soft buttocks and large penises (emblematic of a distinctly feminine lack of self-mastery) that characterize deep thinkers. To impress the young man, Socrates engages in a public debate with a representative of traditional 5th century Greek education, a dignified older military man who denounces the new pedagogy and extols the virtues of obedience to patriarchal authority, imperialistic nationalism, religious piety, self-restraint, and physical enhancement. The youth is unmoved, and chooses to pursue study with Socrates. Upon returning from the school, newly equipped with rhetorical savvy and critical thinking skills, the boy attacks his father on the basis that the time-honored notion that a son should not beat his parent is merely a socially constructed narrative rather than a natural law. Incensed, the father gathers his slaves and burns down the The Thinkery, sending Socrates and his minions scurrying away.

Audiences of the time would have applauded the father's destructive actions, and booed the impudence of Socrates and his pupils. Many contemporary lawmakers and citizens share their sentiment, and find antecedents of Socrates' wan pupils in the legions of college students who seek humanities degrees. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum remarks, current debates over the appropriate aims of higher education "reveal the same nostalgia for a more obedient, regimented time, the same suspiciousness of new and independent thinking, that find expression" in *The Clouds* (2). We can hear faint echoes of Aristophanes' work in the declarations of North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory, who in 2013 lashed out at an "educational elite" who teach

“worthless courses” such as those in gender studies and philosophy that offer “no chances of getting people jobs” (Kinkade, 2013). Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker tacitly targets the liberal arts with his proposal that funding for state universities should be tied to their ability to enroll students in marketable majors: “If you want money, we need you to perform. In higher education, that means not only degrees, but also young people getting degrees in jobs that are opened and needed today - not just the jobs that universities want to give us, or the degrees that people want to give us” (Rifkin, 2012). Aristophanic conservatism towards matters of education is not reserved for Republicans; even President Barack Obama upset humanist academics when he noted, “folks can make a lot more, potentially, with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art history degree.” One can perceive an air of resignation among humanist academics. In 2010, literary scholar Stanley Fish conceded in a pessimistic *New York Times* op-ed piece that “if your criteria are productivity, efficiency and consumer satisfaction, it makes perfect sense to withdraw funds and material support from the humanities - which do not earn their keep and often draw the ire of a public suspicious of what humanities teachers do in the classroom - and leave standing programs that have a more obvious relationship to a state’s economic prosperity and produce results the man or woman in the street can recognize and appreciate.” A writer for *Forbes* agrees, asserting that the problem of unemployment among recent college graduates has a simple solution: “cut out the departments that make students unemployable,” namely, those that offer majors in “anthropology, philosophy, art history and humanities” (Cohan, 2012).

2. Crisis in the Humanities

These arguments are expressions of what is often called the “crisis in the humanities.” From within the academy, opinions about how to address the problem are divided. Some argue that the humanities must remain outside of the dictates of capitalism, and serve as a disruptive force capable of prizing open the dominant ideologies that envelop and shrink the scope of students’ thought and action. Measures that can be understood as “market-driven” or based on a “client” or “consumerist” business model are often a poor fit for educational institutions whose mission must necessarily include a commitment to knowledge, judgment, critical thinking, and evaluation. Concerns about trends toward providing value and satisfaction rather than rigorous intellectual training have been an important part of contemporary discussions. Others concede that the university is inextricably tied to the economic marketplace, and the humanities are not exempt from this reality; it is therefore incumbent for humanities programs to evolve in concert with the practical needs and desires of their students, many of whom feel torn between the compulsion to work towards the development of a more humane society, and the desire to pursue a career that promises economic security and the personal freedom that entails.

Reasonable administrators and faculty at liberal arts universities are increasingly responding to the call to provide more in the undergraduate experience that is considered “relevant” to students’ career aspirations and goals. Increased opportunities to participate in internships, to study abroad, and to take part in “co-op” experiences that alternate work placements with academic courses, are some approaches currently in use in US colleges and universities. These efforts make sense and can be used to augment and enhance a liberal arts education because they do not replace the existing course structure and content. Pressure from several directions including increased tuition costs, poor market conditions for new graduates pursuing paid work, and university rating and ranking systems that grant points for career placements and future earnings of graduates have meant that universities will continue to look for such solutions. These additions to students’ educational experience are welcome and certainly have relevance to their work life after college.

The challenges inherent in this debate over practicality versus liberal arts emphasis on critical thinking, broad-based academic studies for the sake of the development of the individual as a well-rounded person, and intellectual training across a range of subjects take a particular form in relation to Communication Studies, a field that is experiencing astonishing growth in recent years, “posting strong growth in relation to undergraduate majors, undergraduate degrees awarded, student popularity, and number of institutions offering the degree” (Schmitt, 2014). Its surging fortunes may have something to do with its attractively ambiguous profile; it appears to be poised between the competing poles of humanistic inquiry and pragmatic professional training.

Communication programs and departments are indeed able to offer some skills-based courses even when they are housed within liberal arts schools. In addition, students may be attracted to the field because of a perceived potential for employment in communication industries after graduation. Many students who major in Communication are drawn to its open-ended nature. It is a major in which they can learn the professional skills associated with careers in public relations, advertising, and media production, while also engaging with social scientific research, cultural studies, history and philosophy. Students can point to easily identifiable industries for which they can reasonably expect to direct their job searching energies once they have earned a Communication degree. This can certainly appear to be an advantage from the student point of view, as Communication seems ideally situated at the nexus of pragmatic skills training and intellectually rigorous course work.

The expectation that the Communication major will offer the best of both worlds can place faculty members in a precarious position, from which a decisive move towards either pole promises disappointment from some students, but an attempt to remain ambiguously in the middle solidifies, or at least offers support for, the field’s dubious reputation as an ill-defined, amorphous entity that attracts students who are similarly ill-defined and are, moreover, happy to remain so. As one well-known pop culture website asserted in an article on “The 10 Most Worthless College Majors”: “Let’s face

the facts: you are a communications major with a focus on graduating at best, and at worst you are a communications major with a focus on the perpetual existential crisis of having nothing in life that you are the least bit passionate about” (Gallagher, 2013). The satire may sting Communication professors and students, as it suggests that the discipline invites apathy and mediocrity: Communication is the field you study if you want a little of everything, but not too much of anything. Communication is still often understood as a fallback major that is open to everyone who is not able to complete a degree in a subject that is more traditionally understood as falling within the liberal arts tradition. While we may balk at this condescending characterization of Communication majors and faculty, or at its reputation as the best major for athletes in revenue producing sports, it nonetheless does direct our attention to the uncomfortable possibility that it is the discipline’s lack of coherent definition that makes such charges possible, whether or not they are warranted. To remedy this perception, it is necessary to more rigorously delineate the organizing principles around which the discipline coalesces, and provide sound justification as to why a major in the field of Communication is vitally important as an intellectual and ethical foundation from which students and scholars may approach social, political, and professional/economic challenges.

As noted above, we cannot blithely dismiss concerns about the practical utility of degree from a liberal arts institution, including a Communication degree. Students are graduating into a society still recovering from a severe economic downturn, laden with loan debt and routinely assailed by stories of recent graduates returning home to live in their parents’ basements. Traditionalist arguments that extol the virtues of pursuing an educational path for the sheer love of learning are, in many respects, rooted in the same conservative impulse that animated the Culture Wars that seized campuses in the 1990s, wherein the right defended the traditional Western canon as strategy to rebuff the advance of cultural studies and identity politics. Another version of the traditionalist argument suggests that formatting curricula to encompass elements of vocational training demonstrates acquiescence to market imperatives and must therefore be avoided on ideological grounds. Such a position, while politically sound from a left/progressive perspective, is hindered by its curious inattentiveness to the material needs and economic realities that confront all but the most privileged elite; whether accurate or not, students could be forgiven for perceiving this to be a position made inhabitable by the relative security of the tenure track. We nevertheless submit that, within liberal arts institutions, a focus on applied/professional skills training is ultimately detrimental to Communication majors’ success in the job market, to the growth of the discipline, and to the social health of the society at large; indeed, we maintain that these strands of interest are intricately interwoven. Instead of skills focus, emphasis on elements of the liberal arts tradition that are foundational in other academic fields such as history, philosophy, and English, must be held also at the core of a Communication degree. Without maintaining this emphasis, the field may be selling out to some of the potentially anti-intellectual values that ultimately

weaken its reputation. Even practical augmentations of the traditional curriculum such as internships and service learning need to be placed within the liberal arts tradition. A liberal arts education today must offer “a space and time for subjecting experience and practice in the “real world” to critical analysis and questioning. Experiential learning, internships, study abroad, etc., have dramatically changed even the purest liberal arts education. But these experiences need to be placed in conversation with creative imagination, theories, and analytical skills” (Cornwell and Stoddard, 2001). It is important that the core values of a liberal arts education are not lost in the pursuit of job placement, earning potential and marketable skills.

The lionization of efficiency and practical skills training that we observe in the political rhetoric aimed at the humanities, and in the intradisciplinary discussion among Communication faculty, students, and administrators, is out of touch with the realities of the globalized information economy, which depends upon the capacity for workers to adapt to rapid changes brought about by technological innovation, multinational trade, and evolving cultural attitudes towards difference. An applied approach to Communication study trains students to successfully adhere to protocols, practices, and mentalities as they are configured within a particular institutional structure at a given point in time. At a pragmatic level, this is problematic in an economic environment in which the instruments and formats used to create content become obsolete almost as soon as they are “mastered” by apprentice workers. Associate Dean Scott Spengler of Brigham Young University notes that “[E]xperts tell us that the industry-specific knowledge of a typical vocational education is exhausted within a few years,” if not “by the time students enter the workforce” (quoted in Jay and Graff, 2012). These cautions are increasingly apt in the rapidly shifting technological environments in which we find ourselves today. Young adults need to be able to adjust to changes, to think in innovative ways and to work with situations and tools that did not exist a few years, months, or weeks earlier when they were college students. Educators at all levels including elementary and secondary education are turning toward emphases on problem-solving, research, and engaged learning in an environment that changes rapidly and renders practical skills obsolete almost before they can be applied. Communication curricula that continue to focus on current job-related skills will continue to signal the limitations of their degree and graduates. These emphases are particularly inappropriate within larger liberal arts structures and institutions.

At best, the ability to operate the equipment du jour of media production or convincingly use the vernacular of the workspace may yield immediate results in terms of securing entry-level positions, but such skills have a frighteningly brief shelf life. Daniel Everett, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Bentley University, recounts what a successful Bentley alumnus told him: “You need business skills to get a job at our firm. But you need the arts and sciences to advance.” A study conducted in 2013 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AA&U) bears this out. In a survey of 318 prospective employers, “[N]early all those surveyed (93%) agree, ‘a candidate’s demonstrated capacity

to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.” The association has developed its own campaign, under the name LEAP, aimed to focus on “essential learning outcomes” that center on elements of a traditional liberal education such as critical think and analysis, rather than on more applied skills (<<https://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes>>). Individual business leaders match the AA&U’s claim. The chairman and CEO of State Farm Insurance notes that at his company, “our employment exam does not test applicants on their knowledge of finance or the insurance business, but it does require them to demonstrate critical thinking skills” and “the ability to read for information, to communicate and write effectively, and to have an understanding of global integration” (Jay and Graff, 2012). Indeed, many corporations actively seek out humanities majors because they recognize and creatively respond to change, among them Google, whose vice president once claimed that out of the 6,000 people they intended to hire in the next year, 4,000 to 5,000 would be graduates of liberal arts programs (quoted in Jay and Graff, 2012).

Specialization in a narrowly defined area of expertise produces modes of thought, feeling, and action that winnow down subjects’ capacity to generate innovative ideas or respond to contingency with agility. When there is a pre-ordained goal to be achieved, perception becomes limited to only that which will contribute to its achievement. This is a laudatory orientation in a racehorse, but one that we should perhaps not seek to cultivate in our undergraduates. In 1918, the sociologist Thorstein Veblen observed a troubling move towards specialization in the American higher education system, and argued that it “draws off attention and interest from other lines than those in which the specialization falls, thereby widening the candidate’s field of ignorance while it intensifies his effectiveness within his specialty” (1957, p. 152). Recognizing that Veblen’s critique had implications that extended beyond the campus, the rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke later developed the concept of “trained incapacity,” which he explains is a “state of affairs whereby one’s very abilities can function as blindnesses” (1984, p. 7). As an illustration, he offers the following: “If we had conditioned chickens to interpret the sound of a bell as a food-signal, and if we now rang the bell to assemble them for punishment, their training would work against them; with their past education to guide them, they would respond in a way which would defeat their own interests” (Burke, 1984, p. 7). While we may want to complicate Burke’s evocation of behaviorism, we nevertheless may fruitfully question whether a Communication curricula that promotes professional training at the expense of humanistic inquiry serves to indoctrinate students into grooves of experience which, through habituated practice, calcify their intellectual development and leave them hampered in their efforts to adapt to changing conditions in the interlocking cultural, social, political or professional spheres.

If we acknowledge that the push towards practical/applied training for the professions is essentially a frank admission that higher education is inextricably entangled with capitalism, we may use this insight as a means to think through the degree to which this relationship has become codependent

and deleterious. Psychology pioneer Abraham Maslow's famous dictum - "To the man who only has a hammer, everything he encounters begins to look like a nail" - takes on alarming resonance when we survey the trend towards a significant number of students' appalled, condemnatory response to professors who introduce emotionally unpleasant material or challenging arguments that contradict students' pre-established worldviews. Constituted as consumers by a lifelong immersion in a cultural environment infused with the capitalist ethos, students carry the expectations they bring to the marketplace of goods into the marketplace of ideas. Students are "increasingly regarded as customers and consumer satisfaction is paramount," thus "it's imperative to avoid creating potential classroom friction with unpopular ideas" (Kipnis, 2015). Trouble ensues when they find that few professors seek to design their syllabi to cater to the values and desires of individual consumers, as would Amazon or OkCupid.

Perhaps even more troublingly, faculty members are finding little support from administrators when problems of this nature arise. Observers lament that "evidence of the penetration of market values can be seen in the extent to which colleges and universities have adopted corporate management models; "Total Quality Management" and other trendy fads of business management have found their way into the discourse of deans and presidents" (Cornwell and Stoddard, 2001). Academic values such as intellectual freedom can take a back seat to the more simplistic goal of pleasing students.

For instance, in 2015 Teresa Buchanan, a tenured associate professor of education at Louisiana State University, where she had taught for 20 years, was fired for saying the word "fuck" in class, and for making a joke about the diminishment of sexual desire over the course of a long-term relationship. Students felt that these actions created a "hostile learning environment," and a faculty committee agreed, adding that her words were a form of sexual harassment. Similarly, students at Northwestern University brought feminist film professor Laura Kipnis up on charges of sexual discrimination after she published a provocative article about the sexual politics on American campuses, arguing that her words created a "chilling effect" on students who had been sexually assaulted. The university pursued a vigorous investigation of Kipnis, and when another professor supported her in a Faculty Senate hearing, he was brought up on charges as well. The college administrations' reticence to defend the intellectual freedom of faculty in the face of student dissatisfaction with the product professors are providing may be due to the fact that colleges and universities are "increasingly not run by faculty or former faculty," but by "professional administrators who have a customer service or client service attitude towards students" (Golberg, 2015). Buchanan notes that at LSU, the administrators "had the discourse and language of a business person," and her dean "calls himself the CEO of his organization" (qtd. in Goldberg, 2015). The confluence of profit imperatives and consumer expectation has created "a symbiosis between student demands for emotional safety and the risk-aversion of bloated bureaucracies" (Goldberg, 2015). While each case necessarily has its own set of parameters and contextual elements beyond the scope of this essay, what we wish to highlight here is the notion that consumerist and

service models of education tend to provide yet another form of pressure toward the provision of fact-based education that contributes to job skills, more naturally than toward an emphasis on original thinking, intellectual freedom, and reasoned debate between informed participants.

It is becoming increasingly rare for colleges and departments to explicitly foreground in their mission statements the goal of nurturing in students the intellectual fluidity and ethical commitment necessary for the flourishing of a robust democratic society. Instead, hazily defined buzzwords such as “leadership” and “service” are featured prominently in recruiting materials and convocation speeches. Literary critic William Deresiewicz argues that the model of leadership and service being sold is rooted in neoliberalism, which “dovetails perfectly with meritocracy,” and “has created a caste system: ‘winners and losers,’ ‘makers and takers,’ ‘the best and the brightest’” (2015, p. 30). College students are prompted to pursue leadership to define themselves over and against the followers. Only after one has become safely ensconced among the economic elite, the nascent humanitarian impulse may be allowed room to play, by way of service to the underprivileged. “Service,” Deresiewicz writes, “is what the winners do when they find themselves in a benevolent mood” (2015, p. 31). He explains that the unbalanced marriage of neoliberal competitive individualism and social consciousness found its first widespread expression in the United States during the Clinton era, and allowed educated elites to imaginatively distance themselves from the cold-hearted Social Darwinism of Reaganism without sacrificing class status and economic comfort. “Clintonism,” he writes, means that the affluent “use their money and power, or a bit of it, to help the less fortunate - because the less fortunate (ie, the losers) can’t help themselves” (2015, p. 31). This dynamic is especially apparent in the life goals described by Communication majors, who often take pains to discursively qualify their entrepreneurial ambition with earnest assurances that it is driven by a desire to ultimately “do good” in the world. Students might profess interest in pursuing a career in advertising or public relations in order to make ethical changes to the standard business procedures in these fields. While these are worthy goals, it is important to help students develop habits of mind as well as life goals that bring together deep commitments, intellectual grounding and a sense of purpose. The development of each of these elements takes time, reflection and individual attention from faculty.

From our perspective, this is certainly preferable to the heedless pursuit of profit. However, we wish to make an argument for cultivating dissonance, rather than alleviating it with soothing assurances that the Communication degree offers a respite from gnawing doubts about the congruity of capitalism and social change. Indeed, we submit that Communication’s central contribution to professional and public life may be its capacity to illuminate the points at which systems of rhetorical and social exchange do not fit together with precision and equanimity. At these points of fissure there is personal, professional, and political work that calls for urgent care. Here again we may look to Burke for guidance. Following on his observations concerning

trained incapacity, Burke established a theory of “piety,” which he called “a system-builder, a desire to round things out, to fit experiences together in a unified whole. Piety is ‘the sense of what properly goes with what’” (1984, p. 74). While piety is traditionally used in religious contexts to describe habits of thought and behavior that are indications of a subject’s unwavering adherence to a spiritual belief system, Burke extends piety to encompass everyday habituated practices. Piety begins as a set of culturally constructed behaviors and expectations associated with a particular social identity, but through ritualized, routinized practices, it becomes deeply embodied, and unconscious, to the point of seeming “natural” (1984, p. 69). The attitudes and desires associated with success under neoliberalism - competitive individualism, the expectation of efficiency in labor and service, and the demand for quantitative or material markers of achievement - are woven into every aspect of private and public life, and have become a kind of secular religion. It should be unsurprising that the introduction of ways of thinking that contradict or fail to meet these standards should garner disappointment and, at times, hostility. Piety integrates disparate attitudes and practices into “a complex interpretive network” (Burke, 1984, p. 75) so that, for instance, upon being asked by a professor to contemplate ideas that run counter to one’s preconceived ideological truths, one may experience the same indignation he or she might feel upon being served the wrong dish at a restaurant, and call for similar redress for the inconvenience. Likewise, when humanities professors argue that the study of history, art, and philosophy is important and necessary, this can strike students, administrators, and politicians as a wasteful deviation from the prescribed course to success, and when viewed through the myopic interpretive lens of neoliberalism, this is true.

However, as we have shown, the call for more “practical” education is an impractical solution to the problem of adapting to an increasingly fluid and contingent social and economic milieu. Like a snake eating its own tail, pious adherence to the dictates of neoliberalism in higher education produces young people who are ill-equipped to thrive within the new global capitalism, or to recognize and intervene in capitalist practices that are ethically problematic or existentially limiting. Just as a religious fundamentalist will understand all crises as emanating from, and best remedied by appealing to, the will of the gods, students who exclusively train to be better subjects of capitalism will likely perceive all social, professional and personal challenges to be outgrowths of their success or failure to obey the dictates of that orientation. The result is a narrowing of the creative faculties that is counterproductive to social progress, professional utility, and personal enrichment.

How can a humanities orientation act as a potential corrective? It has become something of a cliché to extol the virtues of “critical thinking,” and the overuse of the trope may have robbed it of some of its rhetorical power. We might begin by revisiting the notion of what it means to be “critical.” In everyday usage, it often denotes either disapproving judgment, or the connoisseur’s acumen for selecting the most appropriate object from among the currently available range of options. Implicit in both of these conceptions

of the term is a trace of elitism - the critic is one who polices, and like the police officer, works to maintain and fine-tune the established order. What has been lost is the Enlightenment association of criticism with radical disruption for the purpose of exposing fallow systems and building sturdier structures. Paul Crosthwaite comments that the purpose of critical thought is to “register and amplify conditions of crisis in the pursuit of a radical renewal of the intellectual and social order” (2011, p. 2). When we think of the critical endeavor in generative, rather than negative terms, we redirect the perception of humanities education to highlight that it might contribute to actors in any professional or social context: namely, a mode of perception that is positioned simultaneously towards recognizing defective or obsolete arrangements, and inventing new and better ways of doing things. It should be possible to combine elements from both impulses, effectively “[s]ynthesising and highlighting [...] commonalities inside a more comprehensive and materialist method” to “equip US students for contemporary citizenship and work” (Miller, 2012). In this sense, the critical thinking pedagogy espoused in the humanities is ideally suited to the organizational dynamics of postmodernity, while the doctrine of applied professional training is a relic of a fading reality.

3. Conclusion

The humanities are by definition always in a state of crisis, because the world is always in a state of crisis, insofar as social conflicts are foundationally rooted in the impasses that emerge when different systems of thought and patterns of action meet and struggle to achieve supremacy. Such points require people with the intellectual breadth and depth, ethical character, and communicative fluency necessary to craft a synthesis. The study of Communication should be designed to place students in the best possible position of preparation with respect to these qualities. The present historical moment offers elements that underscore the urgency of refocusing on liberal arts values in a world that is changing ever more rapidly. Moves toward speed, efficiency, superficiality, surface, snap judgment and quick profit mitigate against endeavors characterized by deep thought, intellectual challenge and academic rigor. It is becoming increasingly clear that, under the various pressures created by changes in technology, economics and student aspirations, institutions of higher learning will find it increasingly more difficult to hold on to values that require students to examine their own weaknesses as well as those of the society and world in which they live. Liberal arts institutions will continue to suffer from the same negative and anti-intellectual claims about the irrelevance of their work and its lack of practical application. It is up to faculty and administrators to continue to argue for the value of independent critical thought, problem solving in new situations and environments and focus on the human side of social problems and solutions.

Within the field of Communication, it will be ever more important to show that our field’s intellectual contribution is substantial, and that the

discipline is not uniquely prepared to provide practical training and pre-professional applied course work as compared with other liberal arts majors. Programs providing service learning, internships, and study abroad should not be provided at the department level, but should be equally accessible by students from all majors. In this way, the educational foundation of a Communication degree must be found in the academic traditions of the field, not in the employment opportunities to which it can connect. If we go too far down the path of offering practical and skills-oriented course work, we expose ourselves to criticisms regarding lack of intellectual rigor, comparative ease of study, and inferiority of the major and the degree as compared to other traditional liberal arts disciplines. If Communication departments are to be housed within schools of Arts and Sciences or liberal Arts, we need our students to find a love of Communication Studies as an intellectual pursuit above and beyond, or even apart from, the goal of pursuing a particular job or career.

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