

English for Liberal Arts: A New (Re)Vision of the ELP

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The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see.
—Winston Churchill (Morris, 2010, p. 1)

This paper argues that the English Language Program (ELP) at International Christian University has a unique historical opportunity to identify itself as an English for Liberal Arts program and to promote a new paradigm of language teaching. It locates the ELP within the institutional mission of International Christian University, provides both broad and narrow definitions of what that identification means, and undertakes a paradigmatic archaeology of the ELP to explore the sedimentary layers of language teaching—such as the audio-lingual method, the content-based approach, and the EAP model—that underlie its curriculum and self-conception. The paper identifies aspects of an English for Liberal Arts approach to language teaching already present in the curriculum, and points to areas where pedagogy and curriculum should be re-defined or re-formulated in this new light. This paper was originally presented as an address in the Lectures on Language and Linguistics Series at International Christian University on January 24, 2006 and has special significance as the English Language Program (ELP) will be renamed the English for Liberal Arts Program (ELA) in April of 2012.

This is not a canned talk that I'll give over and over but a paper prepared particularly for this occasion and this tough audience. You know the old definition of an expert: "Anybody who's more than thirty miles from home." Well, I guess I don't get to be an expert today, and I know "a prophet has no honor in his own country." Still, I'd like you to fend off the tendency for familiarity to breed contempt and ask you to consider my message and not just this messenger. There will be plenty of chances to kill me later if you want to.

I could start by quoting Cardinal Newman or former Harvard President Derek Bok on liberal arts but I thought instead I'd be innovative and 'do what the students do' when they have to write a paper or prepare a presentation: Just Google it.

As of last week, the phrase "liberal arts" gives you more than a few hits using the Google Search engine: 59,600,000 to be somewhat exact. But if you want to limit the search by putting the phrase in quotation marks, you get only 36,400,000. To be honest, I didn't look through all of them.

But the phrase "English for Liberal Arts" gives you just 49. Forty-nine. This is amazing given that you can type gibberish backwards into Google and you'll get hundreds of hits (somewhere on Google those 100 monkeys are randomly typing the complete works of Shakespeare). Yet when you cut out the duplicates of these 49 there are only about 25 honest-to-god entries. I did read all of these and they were irrelevant to the meaning intended here: they were mostly titles of individual classes at universities in Korea, Thailand, and Quebec

(many for math or pharmaceutical programs). Nothing on ICU's website came up, so even *we* are a bit behind the algorithmic search curve—if there is a curve at all.

And that's the topic of my talk today—it's an initial foray into what "English for Liberal Arts" might mean, and what a program dedicated to "English for Liberal Arts" might be like. It's my thesis that the ELP is one of the few programs in Japan that is possibly positioned to distinguish itself as an English for Liberal Arts Program—and that it's an opportunity that shouldn't be missed. By this I mean seriously going beyond the rhetoric of liberal arts and actually "doing liberal arts," to borrow the phrase used by our current deans and recent presidents.

Definitions of Liberal Arts

But I'm getting ahead of myself. First, what does "liberal arts" mean? A well-worn phrase as Google suggests, widely used but seldom defined. Perhaps the classic definition is from John Henry Newman's classic *The Idea of a University* published in 1873: "to open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to know, and to digest, master, rule, and use its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method, [and] critical exactness...."

The best contemporary definitions of "liberal arts" come, maybe unsurprisingly, from American liberal arts college and universities, where they are the most prevalent. Three that are particularly eloquent and representative—from Grinnell College in Iowa, Lawrence University in Wisconsin, and the University of Nebraska—I've printed for you in Appendix 1. I'll refer briefly to some of these later.

But we don't need to look too far afield for definitions and direction—ICU has already articulately defined its own view of liberal arts, advanced its own self-definition as a liberal arts university, and set forth the scope of liberal arts at ICU. Not just in the context of the current academic reform, I might add, but from its inception as a university to the present day.

From the present: "International Christian University was established to advance truth and enhance freedom. It is our conviction that all humanity gains from the discovery, acquisition, testing, and proving of knowledge." [opening sentence of the *Bulletin of the College of Liberal Arts 2005-2006*]

From the past: The "purpose of the Liberal Arts College of ICU" is to create citizens who "will acquire and use the skills and habits involved in critical thinking and will develop intellectual curiosity which challenges [them] constantly to seek new answers to new problems." [From the description of a "liberally educated" person appearing in the first edition of the *ICU Bulletin* in 1953]

My personal favorite: ICU aims to develop "adventurous minds capable of critical thinking and sensitive to questions of meaning and value." [from both the opening sentence on "The College of Liberal Arts" from the *Bulletin of the College of Liberal Arts 2005-2006* and the "Proposal to establish a system of majors as part of the curriculum of the College of Liberal Arts" 4/14/2004, M. William Steele, Dean, CLA]

The most axiomatic: “‘Doing Liberal Arts’ will be the underlying theme of all academic activities at ICU.” [concluding sentence to the “President’s Preface” to the *Bulletin of the College of Liberal Arts, 2003-2004*]

It’s hard to dispute that ICU’s self-definition revolves around this notion of the liberal arts: “critical thinking,” “the discovery, acquisition, testing, and proving of knowledge,” “intellectual curiosity... seeking new answers to new problems,” “sensitivity to questions of meaning and value.” And these, it is argued, and I quote, should be “the underlying theme for ALL academic activities at ICU”—from chemistry to philosophy and peace studies to computer science. And what about the ELP? Does the ELP have anything to do with the liberal arts—practically, historically, or philosophically? Prior to a couple of years ago, the phrase was not heard very often in the ELP. The preliminary answer to this question is, “Not a lot.” At least not explicitly. Implicitly, perhaps the answer is “Yes,” as we shall see.

In the last three years I have heard ELP colleagues make the following three statements (as the humor columnist Dave Barry often says, “I am not making this up!”):

The ELP is really a skills program.

The ELP is a content program.

The ELP is actually an English for Academic Purposes program.

All of these statements were said earnestly and with zeal—sometimes in large meetings, sometimes casually and among colleagues, but always with conviction.

Another colleague made a fourth statement to me recently,

“I think we’re actually an ESP Program [English for Special Purposes, like for Business or Law] but our specialty is academics.”

Hmm. Interesting. So what accounts for these discrepancies and diverse viewpoints? What follows is an attempt to explore their origins.

A Thumbnail Archaeology

Most of you probably don’t know that I’m an amateur archeologist—emphasis on the “amateur” part of that phrase. When I’m out somewhere I like to stop at nearby archeological sites and dig for a while if they let me—like in Africa in the Olduvai Gorge last year or near Mexico City a few years ago. Or here, at ICU, in my backyard. Here are some artifacts from my collection.

- A quartz spheroid from the Olduvai Gorge. [I found this at the same level and a few meters away from where Louis and Mary Leakey found *zinjanthropus* or “Nutcracker Man” that pushed back early hominid evolution to nearly 2 million years. This ball of beautiful quartz has been chipped to make it smaller and rounder and it may represent one of the earliest weapons used by our most remote ancestors.]
- This is a very old face from the New World, probably Olmec or Toltec from central Mexico (I was at dig sites there but actually a friend gave me this in the US—I didn’t take it out of Mexico).

English for Liberal Arts

And here, from the ICU campus, mainly from my backyard garden:

- here is the head of a stone axe, how curved and beautiful
- this is a hand-held stone scraper that men and women used to scrape the skins of animals

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Jomon stone axe head, ICU campus

Jomon hand scraper, ICU campus

Right where we are now, 5,000 to 10,000 years ago, the Jomon peoples walked where we walked, talked where we talk, they sat around bakayama, and they pressed string into wet clay (that's the meaning of "Jomon") to make intricate designs on their pottery.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Shard of Jomon pottery, ICU campus

They recited poems, they told stories around the fire, they looked up at the stars, and at dawn they looked across at Mt. Fuji and they tried to understand their world, to tie cause to effect; they tried to make meaning and to weave their lives. If we think of phrases such as "the discovery, acquisition, testing, and proving of knowledge," "curiosity... seeking new answers to new problems," "sensitivity to questions of meaning and value" I think we can allow that they were participating in some essential element of what we now call liberal arts and life-long learning—especially as relates to creativity, language, music, song, dance, artifact-making, and community.

The reason I mention this is because I look at institutions and curricula the same way I look at archeological sites. In the archaeological "site" of the ELP we have strata that if we dig down can make sense of these kinds of perspectives—skills, content,

English for academic purposes. They involve the paradigms of language teaching and composition theory whose remnants, sometimes like forgotten civilizations, underlie the present-day ELP:

1. The postwar audio-lingual movement is the first. In the years following the war, newly established ICU was on the cutting edge of language teaching. Following the lead of the Army Specialized Training Program, the early freshman English program left behind the Meiji Era grammar-translation method and broke language learning into discrete skills—pronunciation, listening, reading, and vocabulary. The audio-lingual movement persisted through the 1960s and even into the 1970s. We still see this approach to language teaching in the existence of our Communicative Strategies courses in which separate skills (speaking, listening, pronunciation, which are largely oral and audio) are isolated in individual courses much the way athletes isolate and build up certain muscle sets and skills to help their overall performance in tennis or basketball or football. We also see it in the dialogues that precede some speaking lessons. I should also point out that there is even an older underlying layer, like in the Olduvai gorge the layer below Nutcracker man that yielded up even more ancient Australopithecine fossils, and if we look carefully in our curriculum we can see the careful attention to individual words and sentences from Meiji Era grammar-translation approach *did* survive for a while in classes such as SW (structure writing) which was still taught when I arrived at ICU 15 years ago. But mostly it's disappeared under newer sediments.

2. The content movement is the next layer. As some of my colleagues put it, as mentioned earlier, and as *The ELP Handbook* states, “The ELP is a content-based program.” The Content Approach was in vogue in the 1980s as language-teachers, particularly in universities, began to get tired of the relentless and content-less focus on “skills.” Of course, skills don't vanish in a content approach, rather the content shifts to the foreground as students study real-world academic materials and *use* language skills to do it. The content is explicit and skills implicit—or maybe another way to put it is that they become reciprocal. Content and skills creatively and constructively reinforce each other in language study, as they do in all subjects across the university.

3. The next strata: English for Academic Purposes. The English for Academic Purposes movement in the 1990s took as its brief the preparation of students for the particular tasks demanded by university: If they had to write term papers in their “real” courses at the university, the purpose of the language program was to give them the practice and skills to be able to do so. If they had to give presentations in later courses, an EAP program should give them the practice and know-how to do presentations. The same applies to short-answer tests, essay tests, and academic response papers. Identify the task, isolate its components, practice it, and be prepared to use it later in your real education. The strength of this approach is that it's focused and powerful—concentrate on discrete tasks and conventions regardless of the content—and practice them. The weakness is that it is very “illiberal.” It is like forcing a child to ride a tricycle for a year even when he or she can—or is ready to—ride a bicycle (You WILL ride this trike, whether you like it or not! And for an entire year!). It postpones students' “true education” until later, and that is a bad idea, even conceptually, and one of the reasons why our bright ICU students sometimes have savagely scathing evaluations of Communicative Strategies classes.

4. Up to the next strata. The Communicative Approach of the 1990s, by far the most dominant paradigm today around the world, focuses on using English for real-world communication, fluency over accuracy, and a functional basis for lessons. Many of our speaking and pronunciation lessons in the ELP have been creatively written or re-tooled with this philosophy in mind. Even though the skill is isolated as in the audio-lingual movement, the main focus of the lesson is on communication between participants. Sometimes, individual lessons are themselves archeological sites and have traces of two or three paradigms at the same time. “Visiting a Teacher’s Office,” a spring-term speaking lesson, teaches students the language and communication skills for visiting a professor’s office during office hours: it models some dialogues and gives the student some phrases to use (both part of the audio-lingual approach), organizes them according to function (a communicative approach), scripts the task for an academic setting—visiting a teacher’s office (an EAP approach), and then puts the focus on real world communication (the communicative approach). Other lessons such as “Who Gets the Heart?” in which students have to decide what to do in a situation in which there is a shortage of organs for transplantation draws on a content approach (it’s based on bio-ethics readings), audio-lingual approach (model dialogues and phrases), the communicative approach with its functions and small group discussion, and also a dash of critical thinking: it focuses on problem-solving (John Dewey, just when we need you): who gets the organs when there aren’t enough. Interesting.

In the writing curriculum we have a whole separate archaeology that includes so called current-traditionalism (dominant in the 50s and 60s) with its emphasis on product (the completed essay) and rhetorical mode (chronology, comparison, classification, argument, etc); the process approach from the 70s and 80s with its emphasis on pre-writing, drafting, and editing; and an EAP and quasi-genre approach which views the purpose of writing as preparing students to do particular tasks such as a senior thesis and write in particular genres *in the university*.

You can see how many different layers and influences underlie the ELP.

What strikes me though is the lack of an explicit sense of the liberal arts, at least in most of the strata, which is all the more baffling in that the ELP is nested in a College of Liberal Arts. For instance, there’s no mention of liberal arts in the ELP’s mission statement. In fact, in the 15 years that I’ve been at ICU (1991-2006) there has been almost no revision to the official mission statement (the “Goals” at the opening of the ELP handbook), except that a clause has been deleted and a phrase and clauses inserted.

ELP Mission Statement 1991-2006

Here it is with several annotations:

“One of the cornerstones upon which ICU is founded is bilinguality. There are two languages of instruction and common use in the university—Japanese and English. The English Language Program (ELP) is a semi-intensive EFL program established to provide students entering ICU who are not yet proficient in English with the language training necessary to participate fully in university life at ICU [*which now requires students to take 9 credits in English beyond the ELP*]. The program’s primary emphasis is *English for Academic Purposes* (EAP). As an EAP program the ELP stresses both English

language skill acquisition and development of the basic academic critical thinking and study skills that facilitate a rational and responsible approach to the acquisition of knowledge. It also tries to foster an appreciation of cultural differences and an understanding of Western educational expectations at the university level.”

The clause in bracketed italics was dropped in 1996, and the phrase and clause that are underlined were added. That’s it.

In critical linguistics, textual studies, and literary scholarship, we would say that subtle insertions, deletions, and shadings “betray underlying tensions and anxiety.” And there *is* an interesting history. For instance, around 1993, a couple of instructors tried to add the concept of “critical thinking” to the ELP mission statement—going so far as to make a proposal to the ELP Meeting to insert it—but it was soundly rejected and never brought to a vote. Several years later it reappeared, inserted by an ELP director. Note that at the same time, rather than just saying “skill acquisition” the phrase “*English language* skill acquisition” was added, suggesting “not to worry” but these skills are language specific. At ICU, in the past, it was conventional wisdom that the faculty taught liberal arts and the instructors prepared students to be taught—or participate in—liberal arts. One of our former presidents remarked that ‘instructors teach skills and faculty teach content,’ which, for a very smart guy, revealed a remarkable lack of understanding of the ELP’s content-based curriculum on the one hand and the skill-based nature of liberal arts education as described in the *College Bulletin* on the other. But of course there are political and economic factors involved in these kinds of formulations as well.

So far I’ve shown through my archeology and selected quotations and textual readings that the ELP is largely tilted away from liberal arts in its self-description, self-conception, and history. Until several years ago the phrase was seldom used and highly suspect. But of course there are some vestiges and germs of a larger and more liberal approach to learning if one sifts carefully. Phrases such as “a rational and responsible approach to the acquisition of knowledge” in the ELP mission statement, and the “fostering of an appreciation of cultural differences,” for instance. Moreover, in a broader sense it’s hard to escape the fact that the ELP is situated in the CLA with all the ramifications that that has—presumably the goals of the CLA cited earlier also apply, like the cultivating of “adventurous minds capable of critical thinking and sensitive to questions of meaning and value.” Then there are the presidents’ and the dean’s declaration that “Doing Liberal Arts” is the underlying theme of *all* academic activities at ICU. That’s pretty incontrovertible stuff.

To use a bit of deductive logic such as we try to teach our students in the first term:

Major Premise: “Doing Liberal Arts” is the underlying theme of all academic activities at ICU.

Minor Premise: The ELP is part of the College of Liberal Arts.

Conclusion: Therefore, the ELP should be doing English for Liberal Arts.

End of story if you accept the premises. Socrates is mortal. The ELP should be devoted to liberal arts. Of course, it’s not so easy. We don’t build curricular vision on circular reasoning and syllogism. But if we look at much of what we are already doing and think about the topics that we choose to feature in the curriculum and the areas we choose to represent—well, interesting, they are quintessential to liberal learning, as the next section suggests.

The Future in the Past and Present

School starts in the spring in Japan. And the first topic of the spring term, Educational Values, is the beginning point at which we try to map out where we are and where we are going, and the first steps in liberal arts are to figure out your premises and identify your assumptions. Check out, in other words, the ground on which you stand.

The next topic is Critical Thinking: the means by which we can “develop a rational and responsible approach to knowledge,” the compass and the coordinates by which we navigate on our journey—after we figure out where we are starting from.

This is followed by the topic of Literature—probably the oldest academic subject. Without going too much into history, literature has from the Greeks to the present been one of the main vehicles for cultural reflection and intellectual advancement. Like liberal arts, or as a liberal art, literature triangulates personal knowledge, philosophical and even scientific inquiry, and cultural imagination. It’s a launching pad for inquiry and experience. All those—Educational Values, Critical Thinking, and Literature—and that’s just the spring term.

The others include in fall term “Culture, Perception & Communication” and “Issues of Race,” and in winter term “Bioethics” and fittingly, last but not least, “The Future.”

I ask you, what areas are more suitable to develop “intellectual curiosity” and “adventurous minds capable of critical thinking and sensitive to questions of meaning and value”? What topics could better represent our diverse divisions and their “different ways of knowing” as third-wave feminists and postmodernist theorists put it?

These topics and readings represent a collective effort over many years by ELP faculty and instructors. They’re the outcome of an arduous process of proposing and rejecting, negotiating and arguing, one that at times has driven many of us crazy. There you have it—the liberal arts at the core of our collective efforts. Yet one might also ask, what do ELP instructors do individually when they are left to their own devices—unleashed and unfettered? That would also be an important measure.

Sophomore English Unleashed

Just several days ago a document landed on my desk with the course listings for Sophomore English. Each student must take one Sophomore English class, and the courses are supposed to be a logical progression of the ELP’s content curriculum, except for the first time students have some choice in what content they choose to study. In other words, they choose a topic by which they wish to extend (and in some sense re-view) what they learned during their first year. Each instructor is able to design a course with virtually no restraints except that it should build upon the reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills cultivated during the students’ prior year. The result: these courses show remarkable intelligence, diversity, and, above all, it seems to me, a commitment to liberal learning.

Among them are:

Dreaming of a Better World: Utopian Thinkers in History
American Musical Theater
Love, Shadow, and Self in Western and Eastern Art
Intercultural Communication

Gender Issues Today
An Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods
Current Business Issues
Christianity and Culture

These courses show an intuitive understanding in the ELP of how, at a liberal arts college, language teaching *should be* embedded within liberal learning.

The transition to an English for Liberal Arts program that I want to argue for doesn't eliminate everything that came before it, no more than shifting from a skills-based program to a content-based program means you no longer teach skills. What it means is that some of the questions and approaches of liberal arts shift to the foreground.

For instance, we should take it as a matter of principle that the students' "liberal arts education" doesn't begin *after* the ELP, it begins *with* the ELP. Unlike a purely English for Academic Purposes approach which always exists for the purpose of something else that presumably comes later (a senior thesis, presentations in upper-level classes, etc.), an English for liberal arts approach immediately harnesses goals such as "intellectual curiosity," "critical thinking," "personal growth," and "lifelong learning." Education—and life—are not something that happen later, they're going on right now. The same with the students' liberal arts education. As soon as students arrive at ICU, their language skills instruction and their EAP instruction and their content instruction should take place within a liberal arts context that focuses on important intellectual issues and that stimulates inquiry, that opens minds, and that sparks curiosity. Classes should not be devoted merely to skill-building exercises or content comprehension or mere "communication," though all of these should occur within an enriched and academically challenging liberal arts context.

A Question of Practicality

Of course, there are other questions as well, some of them political and practical, such as "What will attract students to ICU and make its programs distinctive and desirable?" Both Keio and Waseda have launched liberal arts colleges which integrate English throughout the students' study. Or at least, claim to on paper. And there are many EAP and ELP programs now throughout Japan—Akita International University, for instance, focuses relentlessly on academic tasks, subjects their students to TOEFL once a month, and when they're finally ready (their test score is high enough), ships them off to the United States for upper-level study. So the question is, compared to its new competitors such as Waseda and Keio, does a more old-fashioned and rudimentary ELP make ICU more—or less—attractive: remember, according to our long-standing self-definition, "the primary emphasis" of the ELP is *English for Academic Purposes*. And it's been so for going on 20 years. It doesn't sound very exciting or innovative or even accurate considering what we actually do.

But maybe the most important question at this point is "What would a program with an emphasis on English for Liberal Arts look like?" Like liberal learning itself I would start with more questions than answers. And I'm confident that the engaged minds we have in the ELP would love to grapple with these.

Initial and Final Thoughts

Testing: Wouldn't tests be designed more to promote and reflect thinking, analyzing, critical problem-solving, and creative solutions—in other words, the qualities prized by a liberal arts approach, rather than mimetic, remember-the-information exams in the multiple-choice or short-answer test format?

Discussion: Wouldn't we invite students to more often generate their own questions in response to materials, rather than receiving them in the form of worksheets and handouts from instructors? Of course, teachers should provide model questions that reflect the level of discourse and inquiry that they would like students to grow towards. And teachers at all levels of the university should hold out challenging goals for students while also providing scaffolding for students to reach them. Yet wouldn't our topics themselves be presented more as launching pads for inquiry and creative analysis rather than content to be learned as in "content-based" learning?

Reading: I'm simplifying, as I have above, since we have multiple purposes for what we do, and two strands of reading and writing in RCA (Reading & Content Analysis) and ARW (Academic Reading and Writing). But would readings in ARW, for instance, be taught perhaps with a greater emphasis on critical appraisal of text rather than obtaining information? For instance, recognizing inductive and deductive arguments, and depending upon the type or combination of the argument, identifying the propositions, assumptions, deductions and quality of reasoning and evidence. Wouldn't we want to pair or group articles and perspectives so that students play them off of each other or, alternatively, synthesize them? We do much of this already, selectively, such as in the four readings of the race topic in ARW and RCA, but wouldn't critical appraisal, comparison, and synthesis move even more into the foreground?

Writing: This is a topic closely connected to reading. Might writing be more focused on stoking students' critical and creative skills in order to express their own evolving views, rather than largely responding to text, such as in the make-a-summary-and-add-a-comment assignment now referred to as "ARPs" (academic reaction papers)? Or rather than being purely utilitarian in an academic sense: existing simply to prepare them for Theme Writing or the Senior Thesis? After all, many students are now writing their senior theses in Japanese. Wouldn't we want to place greater emphasis on having students write integrative essays that combine secondary research (i.e., expert opinion) with some primary research (interviews, surveys, analysis that they themselves conduct)? Wouldn't we encourage more original arguments, analysis, and insight? Wouldn't we want to contemplate to what degree our curriculum awakens intelligence and cultivates "adventurous minds capable of critical thinking and sensitive to questions of meaning and value"?

Lastly, Sophomore English: Should these commendably diverse courses perhaps be linked with some common critical aims along the lines of Cornell University's freshman composition program which allows students to take widely different courses ranging from humanities to natural science but has an emphasis on common tasks and skills; or Pomona College's "Critical Inquiry" seminars for freshman, which also "vary widely in content" but "share materials and methods from numerous fields of study"? Should the ELP consider teaming up with Gen Ed to offer freshman seminars that explicitly challenge the students with English for liberal arts? A possibility, among many.

Conclusion

There are of course many things I've left out in this talk, maybe many things you wished I had left out, many things I would like to have talked about, many things I've passed over without comment, many more questions I'd like to raise. As philosophers emphasize, the right questions are worth a lot more than premature answers. Ultimately, though, I haven't forgotten that the tentative answers, possible solutions, and actual initiatives will come from those who teach and work in the ELP.

T.S. Eliot observes in "Little Gidding," one of *The Four Quartets*, that

the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (p. 145)

The Chinese observe that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. I think it may be that the ELP is ready for both: to take the first decisive step on a journey of re-definition, and yet also, in doing so, to come to know itself, within the College of Liberal Arts, for the first time.

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Appendix 1

Contemporary Definitions and Descriptions of Liberal Arts Education (1/20/06)

A liberal arts education has at its center four practices that distinguish it from other kinds of learning: critical thinking, examination of life, encounters with difference, and free exchange of ideas. By offering an education in the liberal arts, Grinnell College asserts the importance of lifelong learning characterized by sustained intellectual curiosity and an open mind for assessing the unfamiliar. At the same time, by using critical thinking to identify assumptions, to test logic, to evaluate evidence, to reason correctly, and to

take responsibility for the conclusions and actions that result, a student of the liberal arts can grow personally as well as intellectually. A liberally educated person should be capable of principled judgment, seeking to understand the origins, context, and implications of any area of study, rather than looking exclusively at its application. A liberally educated person should also be skilled at solving problems, drawing together multiple perspectives in the creation of new knowledge. — *Grinnell College*

Liberal learning liberates, freeing us from the restraints of time and place, enabling us to grow, to change, and to respond to the new, the unforeseen, the unexpected. To be liberally educated is to live imaginatively in worlds not our own and to examine values not of our making. Liberal education promotes diversity, skepticism, and debate. It views the world as changing, not fixed. It asks not only what, but why. It insists that we make judgments rather than have opinions, that we treat ideas seriously, not casually, that we be committed instead of indifferent. —*Lawrence University*

Classes taken in the liberal arts can... provide unforeseen benefits. A student with no previous exposure to early American literature, for example, may find an enduring interest in it born by a class he or she was ‘forced’ to take. Other students may find knowledge of French, which they never expected to use, gives them an advantage when they get a job with a company which has a subsidiary in Europe.

Finally, general knowledge enhances creativity. Strokes of genius and solutions to everyday problems both arise more quickly from a mind that has a greater breadth of resources from which to draw. Often subjects which appear to have little or no relationship to each other combine in new and interesting ways.

So the broad-based foundation of education acquired in the liberal arts, which emphasizes the ability to think and communicate effectively, can set students on the path to successful careers. But it also provides the skills for people to act responsibly: as family members, world citizens, and as free human beings. —*University of Nebraska, Lincoln*

Appendix 2 [added September 2011]

A Brief List of English Articles, Unpublished Papers, and Talks on the Liberal Arts, the ELP, and ICU*

1. *Bulletin of the College of Liberal Arts*, 2007-08 (last printed edition to present)
2. “Change, Conflict and Conant: ELP Reform and ICU’s Liberal Arts Heritage,” Chris Hale, *Language Research Bulletin*, 2010.
3. “ICU’s Mission and Background: A Context for ELP Vision and Values” (ELP Retreat 2007).
4. “Liberal Arts for the Twenty-First Century,” M. William Steele, 2007.
5. English for Liberal Arts: A New (Re)Vision of the ELP,” Paul Wadden, 2006.

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6. “Laying a Foundation for Liberal Arts Through English Language Education, Motoko Yoshioka, 2002.
7. “ICU, Liberal Arts and World Citizenship,” M William Steele, 1999.
8. ICU Goals and Objectives from the first ICU Bulletin (1953).

*The author is happy to provide copies of these to anyone who is interested. Please email him at wadden@icu.ac.jp to request a copy.