

Liberal Education and Student Diversity

by Anna Neumann

In times of upheaval, leaders and policymakers often support instructional development in applied scientific, professional and occupational fields, because they think those fields will best prepare students for future jobs and careers.

Yet within every job and career is a person whose aspirations, values, commitments, curiosities and talents can propel his or her job. Jobs don't "run" or "produce" on their own; they require thoughtful, aware and sensitive people who are alert to the good and harm that their job-based efforts can produce, attuned to evidence but able to imagine beyond it, and who can act with discipline but are guided by flexible minds.

That is the premise of MetroCiti, an initiative I created two years ago with doctoral students Milagros Castillo and Liza Bolitzer, which seeks to improve teaching and learning in urban college classrooms committed to diverse students' liberal education.

Liberal education—often infused into the "core" undergraduate requirements and blending with occupational/professional studies—fosters the development of our future workers, professionals, citizens, thinkers and leaders.

Liberal education fosters the development of our future workers, professionals, citizens, thinkers and leaders.



Yet in a society where demographics are quickly shifting—blurring traditional ideas about majority and minorities in our population—liberal education is rarely discussed, purposefully, as a context for the learning of students diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, family educational backgrounds, citizenship and immigration status, gender orientations and so on. We hear much about diverse students'

access to two- or four-year colleges, graduate school and professional education, but little about the access they have (or lack) to the rich learning and personal developmental opportunities that liberal education, thoughtfully conducted, may provide.

Given the promises of liberal education—to broaden and deepen students' thinking, indeed for productive work, but also for creating and leading it and the larger world to which it contributes—it is critical that we offer it at its

best to all students.

Without preparing, as thinkers, learners, actors and leaders, the persons who will "fill" the jobs and careers of the future, it is hard to believe that their work (however well prepared they are for it) will yield a better world than the one we have now.

Anna Neumann is Professor of Higher Education.