

To the editor:

I would like to address the basic question that Taylor Lowrey raised in her Echo editorial of November 4, because it points to a difference between the views that students often have of a university education and the views that the faculty and society as a whole have traditionally held. Students tend to see the university as training for a future career. Within the terms of that model it seems to make little sense for a Biology major to take fine arts or for an Art major to take eight hours of sciences, to use the examples Ms. Lowrey cites. But in the larger view, the university serves society, not simply by producing graduates who are trained to join the workforce, but by ensuring that graduates are informed citizens who are prepared to make the decisions that members of a democracy are called on to make and who can lead richer and more satisfying lives by participating actively in the many aspects of life.

In a democracy, a Biology major is called upon to vote for or against public funding of the arts, for example, and an Art major needs to be able to evaluate for herself the arguments for and against global warming or the teaching of evolution in her child's school. Whether we major in Biology or Art, we need to be informed about health and wellness—we are currently experiencing an epidemic of diabetes in this country because our citizens don't understand the connection between food choices, exercise, and personal health. As for World Cultural Traditions, it is especially crucial for us to understand the perspectives of other cultures in an era when we have to deal increasingly with people whose cultural perspectives differ from our own.

In other words, the university fails in its mission to society if we don't graduate students who are capable of making informed decisions based on a wide range of intellectual perspectives. And I would add that we also fail if we graduate students whose lives are confined to narrow career paths and who miss out on the satisfaction and joy that can come from knowing and doing things outside our field.

Finally, even in the area of career preparation general education serves students well. When business leaders are asked what they want in their prospective employees, they almost invariably say they want more of the knowledge and skills gained through general education, not less. In a world where markets, products, and careers change rapidly, employers want workers who are flexible, broadly informed, and able to use a variety of perspectives to solve problems and develop new approaches. To be sure, general education can always be improved, and I hope that students such as Ms. Lowrey will continue to ask questions about it. But I really think that our general education program is one of our strengths here at UCA, a program in which dedicated teachers work hard to show students why apathy about any field of knowledge is a loss for the student and, ultimately, for our democratic way of life.

Sincerely yours,

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