

Don't Worry, Your Parents Aren't Wasting Their Money

A student's perspective on the value of a liberal arts education

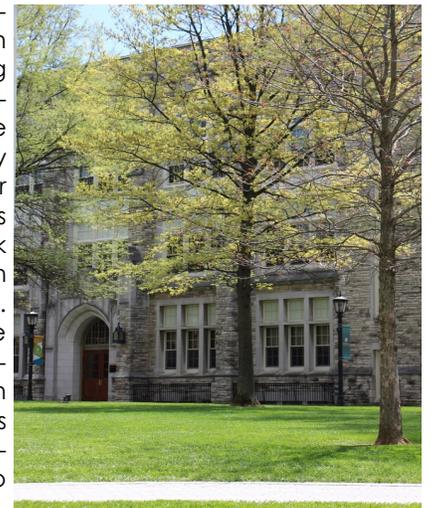
By Kelsey Hawkins

"At the end of the semester, you will leave this classroom knowing less than when you entered it." This was the welcome I received from the first class I ever took at Loyola University. This welcome into 9:00am "Foundations of Philosophy" wasn't exactly the greeting I anticipated from my first college course; however, it was an accurate statement. Apparently I already knew less than I had thought: entering the classroom at 9:00am I knew that each of my classes would allow me to gain more knowledge. That is why people go to college, right? To gain more knowledge and attain a degree. For a moment I worried about whether my parents were wasting their money on Loyola. Naturally, after Professor Guise-Gerrity greeted the class, I was very confused. She was contradicting the purpose of school. However, I misunderstood. Dr. Guise-Gerrity would assist me in gaining knowledge, but not in a manner I had practiced before. Rather than memorizing the biographies and ideas of different philosophers, I would come to understand the ideas of these philosophers and use these ideas to develop my own ideas about life. The new knowledge I would gain would cause me to question everything I thought I knew for certain.

"Strong Truths, Well Lived"

Entering college, I knew what justice, friendship and happiness were; or at least I thought I did until my "Foundations of Philosophy" class. After taking this course, I realized how little I actually knew about these concepts in comparison to Cicero's knowledge about justice, and Aristotle's understandings of friendship and happiness. Every day after reading the pieces produced by these men, I entered philosophy class ready to be challenged by my professor. She would never tell us what to believe, but rather challenge us to develop our own ideas based upon the reading. For example, everyone's goal in life is to achieve happiness. Aristotle agrees with this statement, arguing that every action we partake in is "the means to a good," with the end good being a state of happiness. However, he argues that a state of happiness cannot be reached through actions completed in terms of pleasure or honor. Happiness may only be reached through virtue. The more I experience at Loyola, the more truth I see in Aristotle's teachings. As a result of his teachings I've decided to ask Santa, because he exists, for the funds to go on an international mission trip, rather than receive an expensive handbag. And believe it or not, but I am more excited about the experiences I will gain on the trip than I've ever been about a Christmas gift.

These insightful discussions have created the most profound difference between my college education and high school education thus far. In high school, students are required to memorize information in order to pass a test. However, at Loyola, we are required to develop a deep understanding about information in order to be challenged on this understanding. These contrasting methods of teaching are due to the differing goals between the two institutions. In high school, the goal is to attain a diploma and the best GPA possible. This does not necessarily require a deep understanding of the material, but rather developed memorization skills—which is why I cannot describe the process of mitosis or the significance of The Stamp Act. However, by attending Loyola, I can describe why I believe Aristotle's ideas of friendship are true. I am capable of describing this idea and I would be able to write a developed essay on this idea because my friends and I don't attend Loyola for the sole purpose of attaining a degree and high GPA. Rather, we come to Loyola with the primary goal of learning and developing a well-rounded skill-set. Because although a degree may grant you a job, you are far more likely to find success through the ability to think critically and write well, in addition to your degree. These skills cannot be achieved through memorization, but rather through "deep thinking"; which is where Loyola's beloved liberal arts education steps into the conversation.



Loyola's goal and mission statement includes *cura personalis*, or, the education of the whole person. This mission and our motto, "strong truths well lived," are the keystones to Loyola. The humanities building not only defines the center of our campus, but its courses also construct the basis of our curriculum. The university requires each student to take two philosophy courses, two English courses, two theology courses, two history courses, an art course, a writing course and a foreign language. Through this collection of classes, Loyola develops two important aspects of a well-rounded student: curiosity for a deeper understanding and the fundamental skills to gain and use this understanding. Through English, writing, and history, Loyola students gain basic writing, critical thinking and analytical skills necessary life no matter what professional field you will enter. Whether you need to write a recommendation letter or analyze a document to find support for your claim as a lawyer, for example, these skills will prove necessary throughout life. Through philosophy and theology, the professors cultivate curiosity which allows for a deeper understanding of life. Or in terms of Loyola's motto, curiosity allows students to develop "strong truths."

As important as developing these "strong truths" is, it's not my favorite part of our motto. The second component, "well lived" is what allows me to play with 6 year olds every Thursday from 3:00pm-5:00pm. Through Loyola's service-learning, I am given the opportunity to fight for my developing ideas of justice while working with my little friends. I am given the opportunity to use my developing writing skills in order to reach out to their parents. I am given the opportunity to make experiences outside the classroom, learning experiences. Through service, our student body is given "more perspectives to think about" which allows us to learn respect for different ways of life that we wouldn't otherwise interact with. This enables us to make deeper connections throughout our global community. With these connections, we develop a deeper understanding of the world as a whole, which is important in understanding empathy. This empathy is essential to treating the world with respect and, in turn, the development of the whole person, which Loyola strives for.

Cura Personalis: "care for the whole person"

The motto, "strong truths well lived," and the idea of *cura personalis* would not be possible without the unique attitudes of the professors at Loyola. All students should be very grateful toward our professors for their selflessness. Unlike most college professors, Loyola's teachers did not come to the school in hopes of research opportunities, even though they pursue these, too. They are here because they have a strong desire to teach and because they believe, as Professor Guise-Gerrity affirms, that watching students grow "is a brilliant thing to see." Their favorite part of their job is assisting us in developing a deeper understanding, and mastering fundamental skills. According to Dr. Guise-Gerrity and Dr. Leary, the reason professors come to teach at Loyola is for the joy they receive when "watching a person discover ideas they hadn't had before" or seeing an idea that "resonates with them for the first time ever." The selfless attitudes of the professors are what drive their teaching methods, which, in turn, allow a deep curiosity and an emphasis on service.

When entering Loyola as a student, therefore, you should be prepared to be challenged. Although I left Professor Guise-Gerrity's class freshman year with more uncertainty about my understanding of the world, I am confident that when I graduate I will know more, and be more prepared for the rest of my life, having studied at Loyola. So don't worry, I promise, your parents are not wasting their money.

