

The Relationship between Liberal Arts and Diversity



CHAPTER

4

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Do you see any commonality or connection between learning from the liberal arts and learning from diversity?

Diversity Advances and Enriches the Liberal Arts

Learning about and from diversity increases the power of a liberal arts education (31). Similar to how different subjects in the liberal arts expose you to multiple perspectives, so do experiences with diversity. Diversity experiences expand your view of the world beyond the narrow-angle lens of your own culture (a monocultural perspective), equipping you with a wide-angle lens that enables you to view the world from a multicultural perspective. This multicultural perspective is consistent with

one of the primary major goals of the liberal arts—to liberate (free) you from the tunnel vision of ethnocentrism (18).

Learning about others who differ from you also contributes to another major goal of the liberal arts: self-awareness. One of the most frequently cited outcomes of the liberal arts is to “know thyself” (81,279). Diversity contributes to this outcome by deepening self-awareness. When students around the country were interviewed about their diversity experiences in college, many of these students reported that these experiences enabled them to learn more about themselves. Some said that their interactions with students from different races and ethnic groups produced “unexpected” or “jarring” self-insights (180).

Lastly, diversity embodies the principles of a democratic nation and reinforces the original purpose of the liberal arts as a preserver of democracy (83, 128). The United States is a country built on the founding principle of equal rights and freedom of opportunity for all its citizens, including the immigrants from diverse countries and cultures who migrated to its shores. Prejudice and discrimination divide citizens and dislodge the cornerstone of democracy. When the rights or freedoms of any group of citizens in a democratic nation are undermined by prejudice and discrimination, the rights or freedoms of all its citizens are threatened. Given that diversity in America is growing, our nation’s future stability and prosperity will require effective development and deployment of the talents of all its citizens, including those from historically diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds (8).

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

—Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from the Birmingham Jail”



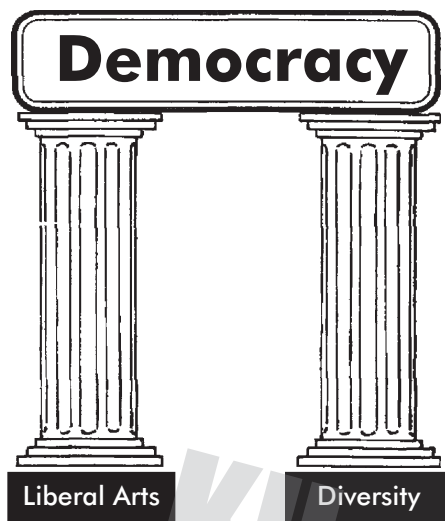
KEY POINT

Diversity and democracy go hand-in-hand; by valuing the former, we preserve the latter.

The original ideal of the liberal arts was to liberate people to participate in a democracy; in reality, not all people were included in the process. The “free men” who first devised and studied the liberal arts in Greece were aristocrats; they were privileged to have the position and time to study the liberal arts, and their opportunity to acquire greater knowledge further distanced them from enslaved serfs and

FIGURE 4.1

Liberal arts and diversity provide two key pillars of support for democracy.



peasants. Similarly, the liberal arts for democracy espoused by the founding fathers of the United States did not include enslaved African Americans, nor did it include American women who were denied the right to vote and other rights that were granted to white, male citizens. When members of minority and disadvantaged groups are denied the opportunity to influence public policies and societal practices, they are left with a sense of political helplessness and lose faith in the democratic system of government (226).

Fortunately, the modern version of the liberal arts embraces the view that all citizens have the right to a college education, which promotes equal opportunity and preserves democracy (80). This ideal can only be achieved if diversity is embraced and included as an integral element of the liberal arts. A core component of a comprehensive liberal arts curriculum is inclusiveness; it's a curriculum that includes and respects diverse people and cultures (189). This is why most American colleges and universities have added diversity as a core component of their general education curriculum (275).

“The Constitution of the United States knows no distinction between citizens on account of color.”

—Frederick Douglass, abolitionist, author, advocate for equal rights for all people, and former slave

“A well-functioning democracy requires not only that differing views be heard and discussed but that decisions be made with an appreciation for those differences.”

—Robert Shoenberg, Senior Fellow, Association of American Colleges and Universities

“I want to study Asian history and women’s history. I’m tired of studying about White people and men.”

—Overheard comment made by a female high school student to a friend at a coffee shop in California

“A national culture or school curriculum that does not reflect the voices, struggles, hopes, and dreams of its many people is neither democratic nor cohesive.”

—National Council for the Social Sciences



KEY POINT

When students see their ethnic identities represented in the curriculum, they see their cultural history is valued, which serves to promote their sense of political efficacy and their belief that participation in their nation’s governance will make a difference for them (34).

When diversity is interwoven into the liberal arts curriculum, historical events are understood more completely and deeply because they’re viewed through multiple cultural lenses (22). For instance, a complete understanding of American history must include awareness of the Indian Removal Act in 1830 that forced Native Americans to leave their reservations and move west, as well as the forced internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Failure to include such events is not only insensitive to these minority groups, it also results in an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of American history.

Integrating diversity into the liberal arts enables all students to appreciate the common themes that unite humans (humanity) and cultural variations on those themes (diversity). This coalescence of unity and diversity creates a sense of community among a diverse student body (40). As we look to learn from diversity, we shouldn’t overlook the unity that transcends our differences. Focusing exclusively on group differences without paying attention to the underlying themes that unite us can actually divide us. In fact, some studies show that when diversity education focuses on differences alone, minority groups are more likely to experience a stronger sense of separation and isolation (264).

When the liberal arts and diversity are studied in tandem, you’re able to dig below the surface of human differences and detect the shared roots from which these differences grow. Although groups of humans have different cultural backgrounds, these cultural differences are cultivated from the same soil—the common ground of humanity.

Diversity Expands and Enriches the Multiple Perspectives Developed by the Liberal Arts

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the liberal arts broaden your perspective to include other people, places, and times. The following sections of this chapter identify how diversity enriches and extends this broadening experience by exposing you to a variety of sub-perspectives embedded within each of the social-spatial and chronological perspectives developed by the liberal arts.

Diversity and the Perspective of Self

Interacting with people from diverse backgrounds increases self-knowledge and self-awareness by enabling you to compare your life experiences with others whose experiences may differ sharply from your own. When you step outside yourself to contrast your background with others from different backgrounds, you move beyond egocentrism and acquire a *comparative perspective*—a reference point that positions you to see how your particular cultural background has shaped the person you are today.

A comparative perspective also enables us to learn how our cultural background has advantaged or disadvantaged us. For instance, learning about cross-cultural differences in education makes us aware of the limited opportunities people in other countries have to attend college and how advantaged we are in America—where a college education is available to everyone—regardless of their race, gender, age, or prior academic history.

“It is difficult to see the picture when you are inside the frame.”

—An old saying
(author unknown)

The more you learn from cultures that differ from your own, the more you learn about yourself.

**KEY
POINT**



Diversity and the Perspective of Family

To fully appreciate the concept of family is to appreciate the variety of ways in which families are formed. Family diversity includes differences in the number of parents present, number of children and extended family members living at home, racial makeup of family members, number of wage earners in the family, and the sexual orientation of the family's partners. Following are some of the diverse forms of families found in society today.

- Nuclear families: contain two spouses and one or more children
- Extended families: include members who are related to the nuclear family (e.g., grandparents, uncles, aunts, or adult children)
- Families with or without children
- Single-parent families: include one parent and one or more children
- Patriarchal families: the father is the major authority figure and decision maker
- Matriarchal families: the mother is the major authority figure and decision maker
- Multiethnic or multiracial families: include family members from more than one race or ethnic group
- Stepfamilies: one or both parents are not biological parents of the children
- Blended families: contain two or more siblings who are not related biologically, but who have become members of the same family through remarriage of one of their biological parents
- Single-income families: include only one wage-earner
- Families with adopted children
- Families with children whose parents are unmarried
- Families in which the partners are gay

As this list demonstrates, gaining a complete and accurate perspective of the American family requires taking multiple sub-perspectives and includes awareness of diverse familial arrangements.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Which of the above family arrangements most closely corresponds to the one in which you were raised? In what way(s) do you think your family structure affected your development and the person you are today?

Author Experience—Barack Obama, forty-fourth president of the United States

As a child of a black man and a white woman, someone who was born in the racial melting pot of Hawaii, with a sister who's half Indonesian but who's usually mistaken for Mexican or Puerto Rican, and a brother-in-law and niece of Chinese descent, with some blood relatives who resemble Margaret Thatcher and others who could pass for Bernie Mac, family get-togethers over Christmas take on the appearance of a U.N. General Assembly meeting. I've never had the option of restricting my loyalties on the basis of race, or measuring my worth on the basis of tribe (224).

Diversity and the Perspective of Community

A comprehensive perspective of community requires appreciation of the diversity of communities that comprise society and influence human development. For instance, schools in our local communities play a major role in a person's educational development. Unfortunately, however, all schools are not created equal. Schools differ widely in terms of their resources, their facilities, and the racial and ethnic makeup of their student body.

America has a highly decentralized system of education, with more than 15,000 local school districts making their own decisions about

instructional policies, programs, and practices. Decentralization does allow different schools the freedom to be responsive to the unique needs of their local community. However, a negative consequence of decentralization is that it has resulted in wide disparities in the quality of education experienced by children and adolescents in different school districts. Since schools are funded by local property taxes, the amount of fiscal resources available to schools in different communities varies considerably depending on the wealth of people living in the local community where the school is located. The wealthier the surrounding community, the more tax dollars are available to support its local schools. Thus, schools located in poorer communities typically have fewer educational resources and poorer physical facilities. For example, in 2005, school districts in communities serving the highest concentration of poor students received an average of \$938 less per-pupil funding than districts serving students with the lowest poverty rates, and school districts serving the highest concentration of minority-group students received an average of \$877 less per-student funding than districts serving the lowest concentration of students from minority groups (273).

“You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him.”

—Jonathan Wolfgang von Goethe, influential nineteenth-century German writer and politician

A major goal of the liberal arts is to develop citizens of character. People with civic character are model community members who are respectful of and sensitive to the rights and needs of fellow citizens living in different communities. They also engage themselves in diverse communities, gaining experience with different groups of people by participating in community programs, volunteer service, and civic leadership. “Liberally educated people understand that they belong to a community whose prosperity and well-being are crucial to their own, and they help that community flourish by making the success of others possible” (80). Employers of college graduates feel the same way: National surveys indicate that more than 70 percent of employers agree that it’s important for their employees to “show interest in giving back to the communities in which our company or organization is located or those that it serves” and 86 percent agree that “all students should have direct learning experiences working with others to solve problems important in their communities” (136).

Diversity and the Perspective of Society

Gaining a comprehensive societal perspective requires awareness that our society is now more ethnically and racially diverse than at any other time in history, and it will continue to grow more diverse throughout the twenty-first century (277). In 1995, 75 percent of America's population was white; by 2050, it will be 54 percent (281, 282). Minorities now account for 36.6 percent of the total population—an all-time high; in 2011, for the first time in U.S. history, racial and ethnic minorities made up more than half (50.4 percent) of all children born in America (218).

These demographic changes have created a multicultural society in which the ability to understand, relate to, and learn from people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds is essential for success in the twenty-first century (206, 264). Experiencing a liberal arts education infused with diversity will strengthen your ability to empathize with and relate to members of society whose cultural experiences differ from your own.

Diversity and the National Perspective

To appreciate America is to appreciate diversity. America has a long and unique history of accepting and assimilating people from different countries and cultures; diversity is a distinctive characteristic of our national identity. Immigrants from a wide variety of countries and cultures have built the foundation of this country—literally, because they have always done and continue to do the hardest physical labor for the least amount of pay. Lest we forget, the United States is a nation that was founded and developed by members of diverse immigrant groups, many of whom came to America's shores with the hope of escaping the prejudice and discrimination they faced in their native countries. They came to America with the dream of gaining personal freedom and attaining the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their families (178).

The “American dream” is still being pursued by recent immigrants to the United States. In 2012, there were more than 40 million people born in different countries living in America, the highest total ever (126), and at least one of four speaks a language at home other than English (116).

“The United States is a different kind of nation. Many Americans are immigrants or children of immigrants, are of varied races, adhere to different religions, and have richly diverse cultural backgrounds. What makes us Americans is our common set of values and a shared commitment to the political institutions that preserve them.”

—David Boren,
president, University
of Oklahoma and
longest-serving
chairman of the U.S.
Senate Intelligence
Committee

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Despite being a country that was originally and continues to be a home for immigrants from diverse nations, what common beliefs, attitudes, or values do you think all Americans share?

Diversity and the International Perspective

To take an international perspective is to appreciate the diversity of humankind. If it were possible to reduce the world's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all existing human ratios remaining about the same, the demographics of this world village would look something like this:

61 would be Asians, 13 would be Africans, 12 would be Europeans, 9 would be Latin Americans, and 5 would be North Americans (citizens of the United States and Canada)

50 would be male, 50 would be female

75 would be non-white; 25 would be white

67 would be non-Christian; 33 would be Christian

80 would live in substandard housing

16 would be unable to read or write

50 would be malnourished and 1 dying of starvation

33 would be without access to a safe water supply

39 would lack access to modern sanitation

24 would have no electricity (and of the 76 who have electricity, most would only use it for light at night)

8 people would have access to the Internet

1 would have a college education

1 would have HIV

2 would be near birth; 1 near death

5 would control 32 percent of the entire world's wealth; all 5 would be U.S. citizens

48 would live on less than \$2 a day
20 would live on less than \$1 a day (102)

In this world village, English would not be the most common language spoken; it would be third, following Chinese and Spanish (179).

The need for American college students to develop an international perspective is highlighted by a study conducted by an anthropologist who went “undercover” to pose as a student in a university residence hall. She found that the biggest complaint international students had about American students was their lack of knowledge of other countries and the misconceptions they held about people from different nations (205). When you take the time to learn about other countries and the cultures of people who inhabit them, you move beyond being just a citizen of your own nation, you become *cosmopolitan*—a citizen of the world.

Diversity and the Global Perspective

A global perspective includes human diversity, but extends beyond it to embrace *biodiversity*—variations in all life forms inhabiting planet Earth. Biodiversity is sustained by *ecosystem* diversity—when different biological, climatic, geological, and chemical ingredients in the environmental system combine to maintain the life of the planet’s plants and animals (221). Thus, the contemporary issue of environmental sustainability is actually a diversity issue; sustaining biodiversity depends on sustaining the diversity of the ecosystem. The worldwide significance of this issue is highlighted by the fact that the United Nations declared 2010 as the “International Year of Biodiversity” (IYB) to raise global awareness that preserving biodiversity requires the collective environmental efforts of all nations (280).

Diversity and the Universe (Cosmos)

Diversity not only characterizes humanity and all life forms inhabiting the planet, it also characterizes the universe. Just as we should guard against ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism, we should guard against *geocentrism*—viewing our planet as the center of the uni-

“The sun, with all those planets revolving around it and dependent on it, can still ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else in the universe to do.”

—Galileo Galilei

verse. All heavenly bodies do not revolve around our planet; instead, our earth revolves around them. The sun doesn't rise in the east and set in the west; it's our planet that rotates around the sun to create our earthly experiences of day and night.

In summary, all the broadening social-spatial perspectives of the liberal arts cannot be fully understood without appreciating the diversity embedded within each of them. Understanding the broadening perspectives of the liberal arts along with the diverse sub-perspectives that comprise them serve to liberate or “de-center” us from narrow, self-centered perspectives—such as those summarized in **Box 4.1**.

BOX 4.1

Narrow Viewpoints Combated by the Broadening Perspectives of the Liberal Arts and Diversity

1. **Egocentrism**—narrowly focusing on one's personal needs while failing to appreciate the needs and perspectives of other people in other places.
2. **Parochialism** (a.k.a. **Provincialism**)—narrow-mindedness and unwillingness to expand one's viewpoints beyond a local or regional perspective.
3. **Ethnocentrism**—belief that the customs and values of one's own culture are superior to all other cultures.
4. **Nationalism**—belief that the interests, needs, or wants of one's own nation should be placed ahead of all other nations.
5. **Anthropocentrism**—belief that human needs or wants take precedence over all other life forms and planetary resources.
6. **Geocentrism**—viewing planet Earth as the center of the universe.

Diversity and the Chronological Perspective

The chronological perspective developed by the liberal arts becomes comprehensive and complete when it includes a multicultural perspective on the dimension of time. Cross-cultural studies indicate that Western cultures (e.g., United States and Canada) tend to view time from a “monochronic” perspective, focusing primarily on the present (the “here and now”) and seeing chronological events as a series of successive episodes rather than as an evolving chain of interconnected events. In contrast, Eastern cultures (e.g., China and India) are more likely to take a “polychronic” perspective, whereby time is less likely to be viewed in terms of separate, discrete segments, but more as a continuum in which the three dimensions of time (past, present, future) merge together to form a continuous flow of interdependent experiences (176, 222). A more integrated and comprehensive understanding of the historical, contemporary, and futuristic perspectives developed by the liberal arts is attained when the dimension of time is viewed through the lenses of both Western and Eastern cultures.

Diversity and the Historical Perspective

Incorporating diversity into our historical perspective serves to elevate our awareness of how different groups of people have struggled to gain personal freedom, human rights, and social justice, and how these past events continue to influence how diverse groups are treated today. For instance, a historical perspective leads to a clearer understanding of current-day concepts of race and racism. Historically, the word “race” did not even exist until Americans introduced the term in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At that point in American history, the cotton industry was booming, which created demand for more land and a larger labor force. To meet these needs, wealthy white Americans devised and disseminated the idea of a privileged “white race” to justify taking land from Native Americans for the purpose of developing more plantations and using African Americans as slaves to build a larger labor force (33, 109). Prior to that point in time, the term “race” was not used anywhere else in the world. English settlers created the phrase “white race” to distinguish themselves from Native Americans and African Americans whom they deemed to be “uncivilized,” “savages,” or “subhuman.”

“We cannot expect that a nation which has lost its memory will keep its vision. We cannot hope that forgetting our past will enhance our focus on the future.”

—Bruce Cole, former chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities

Thus, white privilege was gained at the expense of oppressing groups deemed to be “non-white” and provided the historical roots of contemporary racism. American immigrants who initially defined themselves as German, Irish, or Italian slowly began to refer to themselves as “white” as they began to move up to higher levels of socioeconomic and political status (103).

Another element of human diversity that needs to be incorporated into our historical perspective is *generational* diversity. Humans are diverse with respect to the historical time period in which they grew up. The term “generation” refers to a cohort (group) of individuals born during the same period in history whose attitudes, values, and habits have been shaped by events that took place in the world during their formative years of development. Since each generation experiences different historical events, people growing up in different generations are likely to develop different attitudes and beliefs. Contained in **Box 4.2** is a brief summary of different generations, the key historical events they experienced, and the personal characteristics commonly associated with each generational group (124).

BOX 4.2

Generational Diversity

- **The Traditional Generation (a.k.a. “Silent Generation”)** (born 1922–1945). This generation was influenced by events such as the Great Depression and World Wars I and II. Characteristics associated with people growing up at this time include loyalty, patriotism, respect for authority, and conservatism.
- **The Baby Boomer Generation** (born 1946–1964). This generation was influenced by events such as the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the human rights movement. Characteristics associated with people growing up at this time include idealism, emphasis on self-fulfillment, and concern for social justice and equal rights.

- **Generation X** (born 1965–1980). This generation was influenced by *Sesame Street*, the creation of MTV, AIDS, and soaring divorce rates. They were the first “latchkey children”—youngsters who used their own key to let themselves into their home after school—because their mother (or single mother) was working outside the home. Characteristics associated with people growing up at this time include self-reliance, resourcefulness, and ability to adapt to change.
- **Generation Y** (a.k.a. “Millennials”) (born 1981–2002). This generation was influenced by the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States, the shooting of students at Columbine High School, and the collapse of the Enron Corporation. Characteristics associated with people growing up at this time include a preference for working and playing in groups, familiarity with technology, and willingness to engage in volunteer service in their community (the “civic generation”). This is also the most ethnically diverse generation, which may explain why they’re more open to diversity than previous generations and more likely to view it as a positive experience.
- **Generation Z** (a.k.a. “The iGeneration”) (born 1994–present). This generation includes the latter half of Generation Y. They grew up during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and are familiar with the unpredictability of safety in public spaces; consequently, they are likely to have a higher degree of mistrust in existing political systems. During their formative years, the World Wide Web was in place, so they’re quite comfortable with and rely heavily on the Internet, Wikipedia, Google, Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, Instant Messaging, imageboards and YouTube. They expect immediate gratification through technology and accept the lack of privacy associated with social networking. For these reasons, they’re also referred to as the “digital generation.”

“You guys [in the media] have to get used to it. This is a new day and age, and for my generation that’s a very common word. It’s like saying ‘bro’. That’s how we address our friends. That’s how we talk.”

—Matt Barnes, 33-year-old, biracial professional basketball player, explaining to reporters after being fined for using the word “niggas” in a tweet

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Look back at the characteristics associated with your generation. Which of these characteristics accurately reflect your personal characteristics and those of your closest friends? Which do not?

Diversity and the Contemporary Perspective

When diversity is viewed from a contemporary perspective, it's clear that significant progress has been made with respect to social justice and human equality. For instance, the ethnic and racial diversity of students attending college in America is now at an all-time high. In 1960, whites made up almost 95 percent of the total college population; in 2010, that percentage had decreased to 61.5 percent. Between 1976 and 2010, the percentage of ethnic minority students in higher education increased from 17 to 40 percent (209).

This rise in ethnic and racial diversity on American campuses today is particularly noteworthy when viewed in light of the historical treatment of minority groups in the United States. In the early nineteenth century, education was not a right, but a privilege available only to those who could afford to attend private schools, mainly Protestants of European descent. Later, immigrants from other cultural backgrounds began migrating to the United States and public education became mandatory; its goal was to “Americanize” these new immigrants and obliterate their own cultural identities in the process (184). Members of certain minority groups were left out of the educational process altogether or were forced to be educated in racially segregated settings. Americans of color were taught in separate, segregated schools that were typically inferior in terms of educational resources and facilities. It was not until the groundbreaking Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* (May 17, 1954) that the face of education was changed for people of color. On that day, the U.S. Su-

“Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental.”

—W.E.B. Dubois,
African American
sociologist, historian,
and civil rights activist

preme Court ruled that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” This decision made it illegal for Kansas and twenty other states to deliver education in segregated classrooms.

Author Experience—Aaron Thompson

My mother was a direct descendent of slaves and moved with her parents from the Deep South at the age of seventeen. My father lived in an all-black coal mining camp in Kentucky, into which my mother and her family moved in 1938. My father remained illiterate because he was not allowed to attend public schools in eastern Kentucky.

In the early 1960s, I was integrated into the white public schools along with my brother and sister. Physical violence and constant verbal harassment caused many other blacks to quit school at an early age and opt for jobs in the coal mines. But my father remained constant in his advice to me: “It doesn’t matter if they call you n____; don’t you ever let them beat you by walking out on your education.” He’d say to me, “Son, you will have opportunities that I never had. Many people, white and black alike, will tell you that you are no good and that education can never help you. Don’t listen to them because soon they will not be able to keep you from getting an education like they did me. Just remember, when you do get that education, you’ll never have to go in those coal mines and have them break your back. You can choose what you want to do, and then you can be a free man.”

Being poor, black, and Appalachian did not offer me great odds for success, but constant reminders from my parents that I was a worthy person and that education was the key to my future freedom and happiness enabled me to beat the odds. My parents were not able to provide me with monetary wealth, but they did provide me with the gifts of self-worth, educational motivation, and aspiration for academic achievement.

“Knowledge is freedom
. . . ignorance is
slavery.”

—Miles Davis,
influential twentieth-
century jazz trumpeter
and musical innovator

In addition to growing more racially and ethnically diverse, American colleges have also grown more diverse with respect to *gender* and *age*. In 1955, only 25 percent of college students were female; by 2000,

the percentage had jumped to almost 66 percent (243). From 1990 to 2009, the proportion of women enrolled in college increased at a rate that almost tripled the rate of males in the same age range (163).

Also increasing is the percentage of students 24 years of age or older attending college, jumping from 28 percent in 1970 to 44 percent today (69, 285). Over one-third of American students enrolled in college are over the age of 25 (66). More so than any other time in American history, the diversity of students on American college campuses embodies the ideals of a liberal arts—to provide a liberating education for *all* Americans—regardless of their culture, color, creed, age, or gender (18).

“The curriculum should help students understand the significant historical experiences of ethnic groups [and] the critical contemporary issues and social problems confronting each of them.”

—National Council for the Social Sciences

However, despite great progress in our nation’s acceptance, appreciation, and education of different ethnic and racial groups, the United States remains a nation deeply divided with respect to culture, religion, and social class (50). Lingering consequences and residual “ripple effects” of earlier injustices continue to disadvantage certain groups of Americans today. For instance, the manner in which African Americans were exploited and stereotyped has left a long-standing mark on their current experiences. Black Americans continue to encounter prejudice and discrimination in a more subtle form—known as *institutional racism*—a less direct but still damaging form of racism that’s deeply rooted in our society’s organizational structures, policies, and practices. Institutional racism manifests itself in such practices as race-based discrimination in mortgage lending, housing, and bank loans. “Redlining”—a term coined in the late 1960s to describe the practice of marking a red line on a map to indicate an area where banks would not invest or lend money—still continues today. Many of these redlined areas are neighborhoods inhabited predominantly by African Americans (258). Additional studies show that compared to White patients, Black patients of the same socioeconomic status are less likely to receive equal medical treatment. For instance, they’re less likely to receive breast cancer screening, follow-up visits after hospitalization for mental illness, and eye examinations if they have diabetes (253).

Similarly, despite the fact that women are now able to hold professional positions that were once reserved exclusively for men, females

still experience inequities with respect to employment compensation. In 1963, women earned 59 cents for every dollar earned by men, which prompted President John F. Kennedy to sign the Equal Pay Act, making it illegal for employers to pay unequal wages to men and women who performed the same jobs. Still, in 2012, as it was ten years earlier, full-time, year-round female workers were paid 77 percent of what men were paid (7). Females with graduate degrees earn only slightly more than males with a high school diploma: \$41,995 for women vs. \$40,822 for men (251).

Wage gaps also continue to exist in many professional occupations. For example, females earn only a percentage of male salaries in the following professions:

- Physicians: 61%
- Property/real estate: 61%
- Sales: 63%
- Chief executives (CEOs): 69%
- Construction: 79%
- Computers and mathematics: 86% (59, 211)

These wage gaps exist even when women attain the same level of education as their male counterparts (7).

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Are females likely to be represented in equal numbers as males in the career field(s) you are considering? Why do you think this is the case?

Diversity and the Futuristic Perspective

America's racial and ethnic groups that have been called "minorities" will soon become the "new majority" (117). By 2050, the U.S. popu-

lation is projected to be more than 30 percent Hispanic (up from 15 percent in 2008), 15 percent Black (up from 13 percent in 2008), 9.6 percent Asian (up from 5.3 percent in 2008), and 2 percent Native Americans (up from 1.6 percent in 2008). The Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population is also expected to more than double between 2008 and 2050. During the same timeframe, the percentage of white Americans will decline from 66 percent to 46 percent. As a result of these demographic trends, today's ethnic and racial minorities will constitute the majority of Americans by the middle of the twenty-first century (282). Thus, the future prosperity of the United States will depend on our nation's ability to appreciate and capitalize on its growing diversity, and must include the new majority of future Americans in the "American dream."

Diversity Magnifies the Benefits of Liberal Arts

In Chapter 2, the benefits of experiencing the liberal arts were catalogued and documented. When diversity is infused into the liberal arts, these benefits are multiplied. Described next are the ways in which diversity enriches and extends the benefits of the liberal arts.

Diversity Broadens Your Personal Interests and Builds Social Self-Confidence

Learning about a wide range of subjects broadens your knowledge base and strengthens your social self-confidence (80, 195), and so experiences with diversity. Enhancing your social versatility makes you a more interesting (and interested) person who's more likely to add to conversations and less likely to be left out of conversations or have the topic of conversation "go over your head" (261) (or outside your comfort zone). Research indicates that students who have more diversity experiences in college report higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience (19). Furthermore when you widen the range of people with whom you interact, you also gain greater ability to adapt to unfamiliar social situations, which serves to increase your intellectual self-confidence (67, 195).

"Variety is the spice of life."

—An old American proverb

"Viva la difference!"
(Long live difference!)

—An old French saying

Diversity Accelerates and Deepens Learning

Learning about different cultures and interacting with diverse groups of people adds to the variety of neural connections stored in our brain, which provides more varied routes or pathways through which to connect (learn) new ideas. Experiencing diversity also “stretches” the brain beyond its normal “comfort zone” because it must work harder to assimilate something that’s different or unfamiliar. The only way we can learn something that’s unfamiliar or very different is by making the extra mental effort to compare and contrast it to something we already know (3, 202). To make this mental “stretch,” the brain must expend extra psychological energy; the expenditure of added mental energy creates neurological connections that are deeper and more durable. This explains why research consistently shows that we learn more from people who differ from us than we do from people similar to us (230, 232). Simply stated, humans learn more from diversity than they do from similarity or familiarity. In contrast, when we restrict the diversity of people with whom we interact (out of habit or prejudice), we limit the breadth and depth of our learning.

A large body of research also indicates that students learn more deeply when learning takes place in a *social* context that involves interpersonal *interaction* and *collaboration* (84, 86). As scholars put it, knowledge is “socially constructed”—it’s built up through interpersonal interaction and dialogue (58). According to this *social constructivist* theory of human learning, our thinking consists largely of “internal” (mental) representations of conversations we have with other people (289). Thus, the better the quality and variety of our conversations, the better is the quality and complexity of our thinking. By interacting with and learn from culturally diverse people, the nature of our thinking becomes more diversified, nuanced, and complete.

A good example of how the quality of our thinking is strengthened by experiences with diversity is our discovery that a diet high in unsaturated fats (and low in saturated fats) is an effective strategy for reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease (9). This knowledge was gained by learning from the cultural experiences of Eskimos, whose extraordinarily low rate of cardiovascular disease has been traced to

the natural oils they consume as part of their fish-rich diet; these oils contain a type of unsaturated fat that flushes out and washes away cholesterol-forming fats from the bloodstream (105, 162). Similarly, as a result of our studying the culture and practices of Indian Buddhists, we have learned meditation and yoga are effective, drug-free strategies for managing stress (39, 293).



KEY POINT

By interacting and collaborating with members of different cultural groups, we create a win-win situation: we learn from them and they learn from us.

Diversity Strengthens the Liberal Arts' Capacity to Promote Critical Thinking from Multiple Perspectives

Both multicultural and multidisciplinary experiences serve to liberate you from narrowness; each empowers you to view yourself and the world around you from a variety of perspectives. Just as exposure to a diversity of disciplines in the liberal arts curriculum opens your mind to multiple perspectives, so too does exposure to the diversity of human cultures. Experiencing diversity further expands the multiplicity of perspectives from which you can understand and solve problems.

“The nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth out of a multitude of tongues.”

—William J. Brennan,
former Supreme Court
justice

Research on college students indicates that their critical thinking skills develop most when “divergent views are aggressively sought” (123). Other studies show that students who experience high levels of exposure to different dimensions of diversity while in college, such as participating in multicultural courses and campus events and interacting with peers of different ethnic backgrounds, report the greatest gains in:

- * **thinking complexity**—the ability to think about all parts and from all sides of an issue (17, 127);
- * **reflective thinking**—the ability to think deeply about personal and global issues (166); and

- * **critical thinking**—the ability to evaluate the validity of their own reasoning and the reasoning of others (233).

These findings are likely explained by the fact that when we operate within the safety of this cultural comfort zone, it requires minimal effort to understand and be understood by others; this puts the brain on cruise control or autopilot. In contrast, exposure to diverse people and multiple perspectives makes our thinking more effortful and tends to induce “cognitive dissonance”—a state of cognitive (mental) disequilibrium or imbalance, which “forces” our mind to focus on and deal with these multiple perspectives simultaneously (49, 123).

The multiple perspective-taking promoted by diversity also helps us become aware of our cultural “blind spots” and avoid two dangerous limitations of single-perspective thinking:

1. **Group polarization**—When like-minded people get together to discuss their views, their point of view becomes more extreme and they’re more likely to take riskier courses of action (201, 295).
2. **Groupthink**—When like-minded people work together in the same group, they’re less likely to challenge each other’s thinking and more likely to overlook the flaws in their own thinking, which can lead them to erroneous choices and decisions (25, 151).

Group polarization and groupthink contributed to American doctors’ erroneous conclusion that acupuncture, a long-used Chinese method of pain relief, was quackery; this retarded its eventual adoption in America as an effective alternative to pain-killing drugs (149).

“When all men think alike, no one thinks very much.”

—Walter Lippman, distinguished journalist and originator of the term “stereotype”

Associating exclusively with the same group of people not only limits you socially, it also limits you mentally.

**KEY
POINT**

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Do you intentionally seek out ideas from others who have different cultural backgrounds than your own? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Experiencing divergent views and diverse perspectives encourages you to ask questions about why different viewpoints are held and increases your awareness of how your own cultural background shapes your perception or interpretation of events. It also helps you to critically evaluate the ideas you're exposed to in different subject areas and determine whether they're accurate, complete, or biased by the author's particular cultural perspective (23, 24). Be ready to ask yourself: "Whose voice is speaking and whose voice am I not hearing?" and "What cultural perspective (or bias) is the author or producer bringing to this book, website, or movie?" (122,123)

Diversity Stimulates Creative Thinking

Studies of creative people reveal they have a wide range interests and knowledge that cross disciplinary boundaries, enabling them to draw on ideas from multiple subject areas (21, 249). Similarly, cross-cultural knowledge and experiences enhance personal creativity (177, 186). Diversity further broadens the base of knowledge and range of thinking styles developed by the liberal arts, empowering us to think beyond the mental boundaries set by our prior cultural conditioning. When we have diverse perspectives at our disposal, we have more opportunities to shift perspectives and discover "multiple partial solutions" to problems (161). Furthermore, ideas acquired from diverse people and cultures can "cross-fertilize," giving birth to new ideas for tackling old problems (133). Research shows that when ideas are generated freely and exchanged openly in groups comprised of people from diverse backgrounds, powerful "cross-stimulation" effects can occur, whereby ideas from one group member trigger new ideas among other group members (55).



KEY POINT

By drawing on ideas generated by people from diverse backgrounds and bouncing your ideas off them, divergent (expansive) thinking is stimulated, which leads to synergy—multiplication of ideas, and serendipity—unexpected discoveries.

In contrast, when different cultural perspectives are neither sought nor valued, the variety of lenses available to us for viewing problems is reduced, which, in turn, reduces our capacity to think creatively. Ideas are less likely to diverge (go in different directions); instead, they're more likely to converge and merge into the same cultural channel—the one shared by the homogeneous group of people doing the thinking.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

How do you think your performance in your college major will be strengthened by your experience with:

1. Liberal arts?
2. Diversity?

“What I look for in musicians is generosity. There is so much to learn from each other and about each other's culture. Great creativity begins with tolerance.”

—Yo-Yo Ma, French-born, Chinese American virtuoso cellist, composer, and winner of multiple Grammy Awards

“When the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.”

—Abraham Maslow, humanistic psychologist, best known for his self-actualization theory of human motivation

Diversity Enhances Career Preparation and Career Success

Whatever line of work you decide to pursue, you're likely to find yourself working with employers, co-workers, customers, and clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. America's workforce is now more diverse than at any other time in the nation's history and it will grow

“The benefits that accrue to college students who are exposed to racial and ethnic diversity during their education carry over in the work environment. The improved ability to think critically, to understand issues from different points of view, and to collaborate harmoniously with co-workers from a range of cultural backgrounds all enhance a graduate’s ability to contribute to his or her company’s growth and productivity.”

—Business/Higher Education Forum

“Only a well-educated, diverse work force, comprised of people who have learned to work productively and creatively with individuals from a multitude of races and ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, can maintain America’s competitiveness in the increasingly diverse and interconnected world economy.”

—Spokesman for General Motors Corporation (68)

ever more diverse throughout the twenty-first century. The proportion of America’s working-age population comprised of workers from minority ethnic and racial groups is expected to jump to 55 percent in 2050 (282).

National surveys reveal that policymakers, business leaders, and employers seek college graduates who are more than just “aware” of or “tolerant” of diversity. They want graduates who have actual *experience* with diversity (98) and are able to collaborate with diverse co-workers, clients, and customers (16, 136). Over 90 percent of employees agree that all students should have experiences in college that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different from their own (136).

The results of employer surveys are reinforced by findings from surveys of American voters—the overwhelming majority of whom agree that diversity education helps students learn practical skills essential for success in today’s work world—such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving. Almost one-half of surveyed voters also think that the American school system should “put more emphasis on teaching students about others’ cultures, backgrounds and lifestyles” (215). Thus, both employers and the American public agree that diversity education is *career preparation*.

The current “global economy” also requires skills relating to international diversity. The world of work today is characterized by economic interdependence among nations, international trading (imports/exports), multinational corporations, international travel, and almost instantaneous worldwide communication—due to rapid advances in the World Wide Web (95, 111). Even smaller companies and corporate organizations have become increasingly international in nature (51). As a result, employers in all sectors of the economy now seek job candidates who possess the following skills and attributes: sensitivity to human differences, ability to understand and relate to people from different cultural backgrounds, international knowledge, and ability to communicate in a second language (108, 207, 225, 136).

As a result of these domestic and international trends, *intercultural competence* has become an essential, transferable skill needed for success in the twenty-first century (275). Intercultural competence may be defined as the ability to appreciate and learn from human differences and to interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It includes “knowledge of cultures and cultural practices (one’s own and others), complex cognitive skills for decision making in intercultural contexts, social skills to function effectively in diverse groups and personal attributes that include flexibility and openness to new ideas” (290).

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

What intercultural skills or competencies do you already possess?
What intercultural skills or competencies do you need to develop?

“Technology and advanced communications have transformed the world into a global community, with business colleagues and competitors as likely to live in India as in Indianapolis. In this environment, people need a deeper understanding of the thinking, motivations, and actions of different cultures, countries and regions.”

—The Partnership for 21st Century Skills

Internet Resources

For additional information related to the ideas discussed in this chapter, see the following websites:

“Does diversity make a difference?”:

<http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/97003B7B-055F-4318-B14A-5336321FB742/0/DIVREP.PDF>

“Benefits of diversity”:

<https://www.uwosh.edu/stuaff/images/BenefitsOfDiversity.pdf>

“Research reveals the benefits of diversity for all students”:

<http://www.diversityweb.org/digest/w97/research.html>

“Benefits of diverse communities”:

<http://aricherlife.org/benefits.html>

“Top ten economic facts about benefits of diversity in the workplace”:

<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/labor/news/2012/07/12/11900/the-top-10-economic-facts-of-diversity-in-the-workplace/>

Chapter Summary and Highlights

Learning about and from diversity increases the power of the liberal arts. Consistent with the broadening perspectives developed by the liberal arts, diversity expands your view of the world beyond the narrow-angle lens of your own culture (a monocultural perspective) and liberates you from the tunnel vision of ethnocentrism. Just as exposure to different disciplines in the liberal arts curriculum opens your mind to multiple perspectives, so too does exposure to the diversity of human cultures. By interacting with and learning from culturally diverse people, the nature of your thinking becomes more diversified, nuanced, and complete.

Learning about and from diversity also contributes to another major goal of the liberal arts: to “know thyself” (i.e., self-awareness). When students around the country were interviewed about their diversity experiences in college, many reported that these experiences enabled them to learn more about themselves.

A liberal arts curriculum should be an inclusive curriculum—that is, it should include and respect diverse people and cultures. This is why most American colleges and universities have added diversity as a core component of general education. When diversity is interwoven into the general education curriculum, a college education becomes more accurate and complete because events and ideas are not viewed through a single cultural lens. Integrating diversity into the liberal arts enables all students to appreciate the common themes that unite humans (humanity) as well as the cultural variations on those themes (diversity). This coalescence of unity and diversity creates a sense of community among a diverse student body.

Diversity infused into general education magnifies the benefits of the liberal arts; it enriches and extends the social–spatial and chronological perspectives by exposing you to a variety of sub-perspectives embedded within each of the liberal arts. Learning about a wide range of subject broadens your knowledge base and strengthens your social self-confidence; so do experiences with diversity. Diversity enhances your social versatility, making you a more interesting (and interested) person who’s

more likely to add to conversations and less likely to be left out of conversations or have the topic of conversation go over your head.

Diversity also accelerates and deepens learning by adding to the variety of neural connections stored in our brain, providing more varied routes or pathways through which to connect (learn) new ideas. Research consistently shows that we learn more from people who differ from us than we do from people similar to us. These results are likely due to the fact that experiencing diversity “stretches” the brain beyond its normal “comfort zone,” making it work harder to assimilate something that’s different or unfamiliar. The brain must expend extra psychological energy to make this mental stretch, and this expenditure of added mental energy results in the creation of neurological connections that are deeper and more durable. In addition, diversity stimulates creative thinking. By drawing on ideas generated by people from diverse backgrounds and bouncing your ideas off them, divergent (expansive) thinking is stimulated, which leads to synergy (multiplication of ideas) and serendipity (unexpected discoveries).

Lastly, diversity enhances career preparation and career success. America’s workforce is now more diverse than at any other time in the nation’s history and it will grow ever more diverse throughout the twenty-first century. National surveys reveal that policymakers, business leaders, and employers seek college graduates who are more than just “aware” of or “tolerant” of diversity. They want graduates who have actual experience with diversity and are able to collaborate with diverse co-workers, clients, and customers. Furthermore, the current “global economy” demands skills relating to international diversity. As a result of these domestic and international trends, *intercultural competence*—the ability to appreciate and learn from human differences and to interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds—has become another transferable liberal-arts skill needed for success in the twenty-first century.

Questions and Final Reflections

1. Look back at the six narrow “centric” viewpoints listed in Box 4.1. For each viewpoint, provide an example that illustrates or demonstrates it.
2. Think of a culture or community you have visited or had contact with that differs significantly from your own.
 - (a) What made it different?
 - (b) What would you say are the major advantages and disadvantages of living in that culture or community? Why?
3. In light of the ideas discussed in this chapter, how would you interpret or react to the following quotes?
 - (a) “The more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our concept of this thing, our objectivity, be.”
—Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher
 - (b) “Most people today think of college primarily as a stepping stone to well-paid careers but not as a vital means for achieving better government or stronger communities.”
—Derek Bok, president emeritus and research professor, Harvard University
 - (c) “When all men think alike, no one thinks very much.”
—Walter Lippman, distinguished journalist and political commentator
4. From your perspective, what historical event and historical figure have had the most positive influence on America?

Do you think your answer to this question was influenced by your cultural background?

If yes, why? If no, why not?

5. Identify three issues or topics that you think are important to all human beings regardless of their particular cultural background. Explain why you think each of these issues or topics transcends cultural differences.