

Liberal Education Conference 2017  
ABSTRACTS

*The Idea of the  
University & the State  
of Liberal Education in  
the 21st Century*

Mount Royal University



Medicine Hat College

Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
Treaty 7 Territory



**KEYNOTES, SPECIAL  
GUESTS &  
ABSTRACTS**

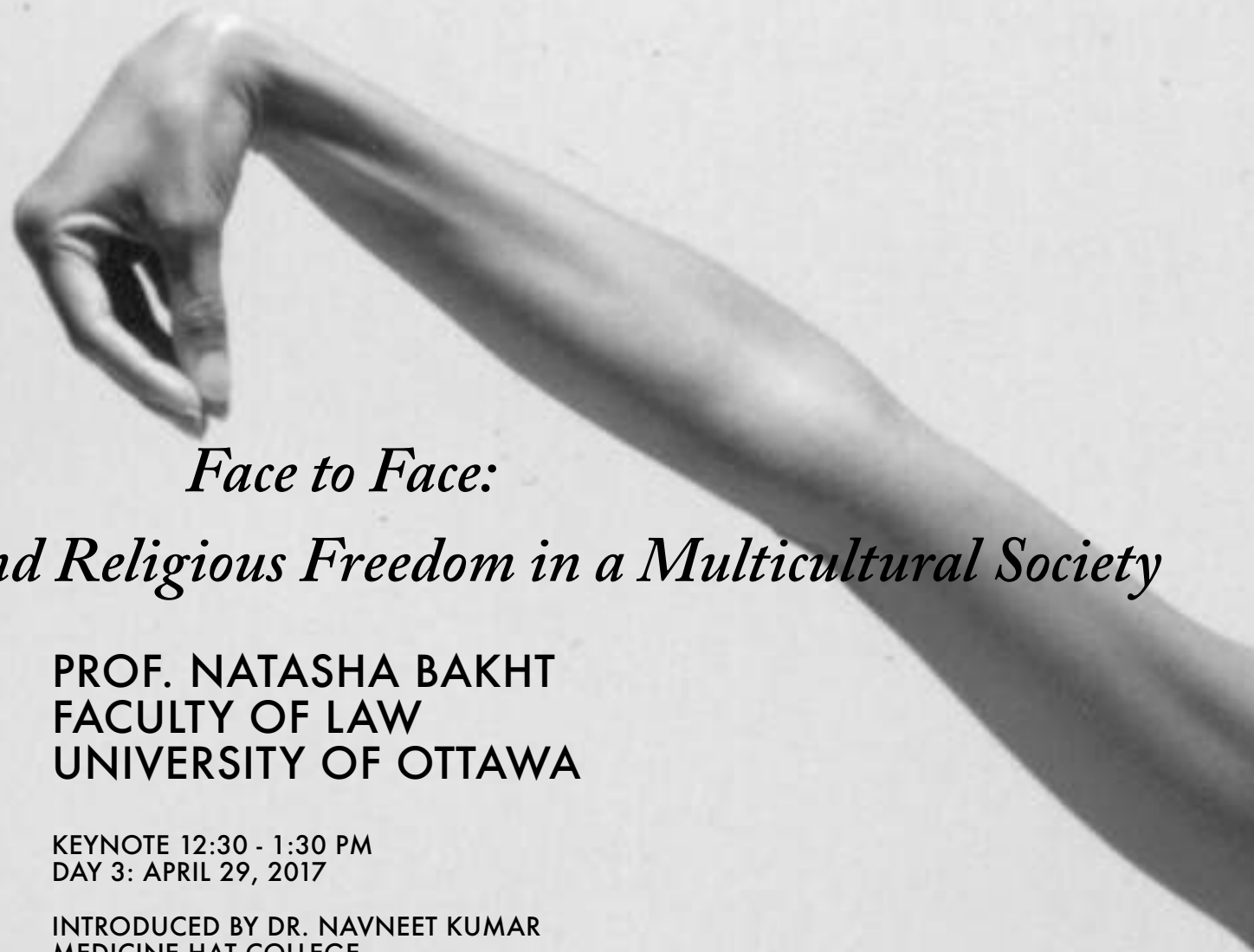


# *The Inclusive Liberal Arts*

DR. KATHERINE AIDALA  
CHAIR AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PHYSICS,  
CHAIR OF ENGINEERING  
MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

KEYNOTE 12:30 - 1:30 PM  
DAY 2: APRIL 28, 2017

INTRODUCED BY DR. MANUEL DIAZ-AVILA  
MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY



*Face to Face:*

*Gender Equality and Religious Freedom in a Multicultural Society*

PROF. NATASHA BAKHT  
FACULTY OF LAW  
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

KEYNOTE 12:30 - 1:30 PM  
DAY 3: APRIL 29, 2017

INTRODUCED BY DR. NAVNEET KUMAR  
MEDICINE HAT COLLEGE



**Honourable Marlin Schmidt (ND)**  
 MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bear  
 Minister of Advanced Education

**Day 1**  
 12:30 - 12:45 PM Lunch and Talk  
 Introduction by Dr. Roberta Lexier, Mount Royal University



**Dr. David Docherty**  
 President  
 Mount Royal University

**Day 2**  
 1:45 - 2:00 PM  
 introduction by Dr. Paul Varella-Connors, Associate Dean, Bissett School of Business  
 Mount Royal University



**Dr. Terry Chapman**  
 Dean of Arts, Education and Business  
 Medicine Hat College

**Day 2**  
 7:00 - 7:15  
 Introduction by Dr. Karim Dharamsi, Mount Royal University



**Dr. Michael Gillespie**  
 Vice President Academic  
 Medicine Hat College

**Day 3**  
 1:45 - 2:00 PM  
 Introduction by Dr. Terry Chapman, Medicine Hat College



**Dr. Michael Quinn**  
 Associate Vice-President of Research,  
 Scholarship and Community Engagement  
 Mount Royal University

**Day 1**  
 7:00 - 7:15 PM  
 Introduction by Dr. David Ohreen, Mount Royal University



**Mr. Dion Simon**  
 Medicine Trail Program Administrator  
 Mount Royal University

**Day 1**  
 8:50 - 9:00 AM  
 Introduction by Dr. Sean Carleton, Mount Royal University



**Dr. Jim Zimmer**  
 Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President  
 of Teaching and Learning  
 Mount Royal University

**Day 3**  
 4:05- 4:20 PM - Closing Remarks  
 Introduction by Dr. David Clemis, Mount Royal University

**SPECIAL REQUESTS**

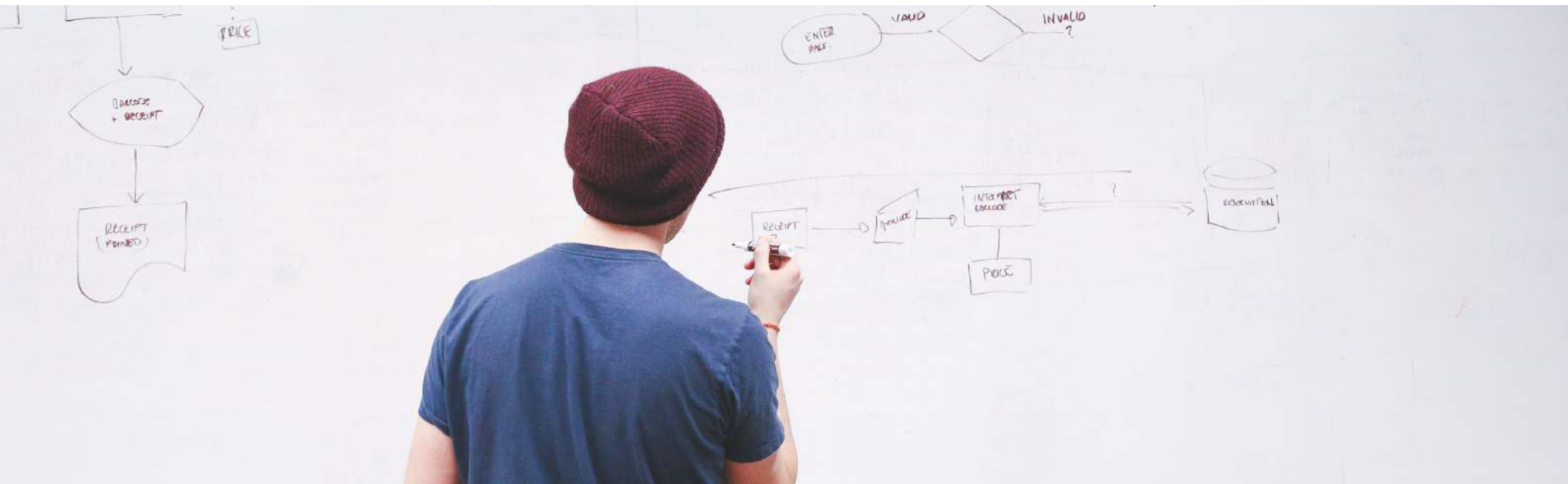


**ABSTRACT 1:**

**USING ONLINE DISCUSSION TO STRENGTHEN STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN GENERAL EDUCATION  
SEMIYU ADERIBIGBE, MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY**

As part of a liberal education program meant for all students, General Education provides safe and open spaces for students to develop essential cognitive, civic, affective, and practical capacities. In doing this, General Education provides the learning opportunities for students to gain knowledge and skills to be functional, responsible and productive members of the society. In spite of its relevance, the goals of General Education are hindered by several challenges (Arnold, 2006; Gersten, 2012). It, therefore, seems crucial to devise strategies for strengthening students' learning in General Education. With General Education playing a pivotal role in assisting students to understand the intersectionality of our social, economic, and political systems, the current global socio-economic and political landscapes also

demands that General Education is strengthened. Efforts need to be intensified to help students to develop critical thinking and reflection skills for analyzing complex global phenomena such as immigration, economic recession, climate change, and cultural pluralism. This study explored the means to enhance students' engagement and learning in General Education using online discussion. Drawing on the pragmatic research orientation, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed in this study. In this presentation, preliminary results and implications for strengthening students' engagement and learning in General Education will be shared.



## ABSTRACT 2:

### ENGAGING “WICKED PROBLEMS” WITH DESIGN THINKING: A PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY FOR THE LIBERAL ARTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY SHARON ALLAN, INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR & DEBORAH FORBES, MEDICINE HAT COLLEGE

The 21st century is fraught with numerous interconnected challenges: environmental degradation, terrorism, and poverty, to name but a few. These are “wicked problems” (Rittel & Webber, 1984). A wicked problem has innumerable causes and is difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and shifting realities that are often challenging to identify. Linear in nature and problem-focused, conventional processes may exacerbate these challenges by suggesting expedient solutions that generate undesirable consequences. The design thinking cycle is recursive, solution focused, action oriented and ever mindful of constructing a life-enhancing future. It is an ideal pedagogical strategy for engaging students in their consideration of wicked problems and what it means to think beyond one’s self interest, and be a responsible global citizen of the 21st century.

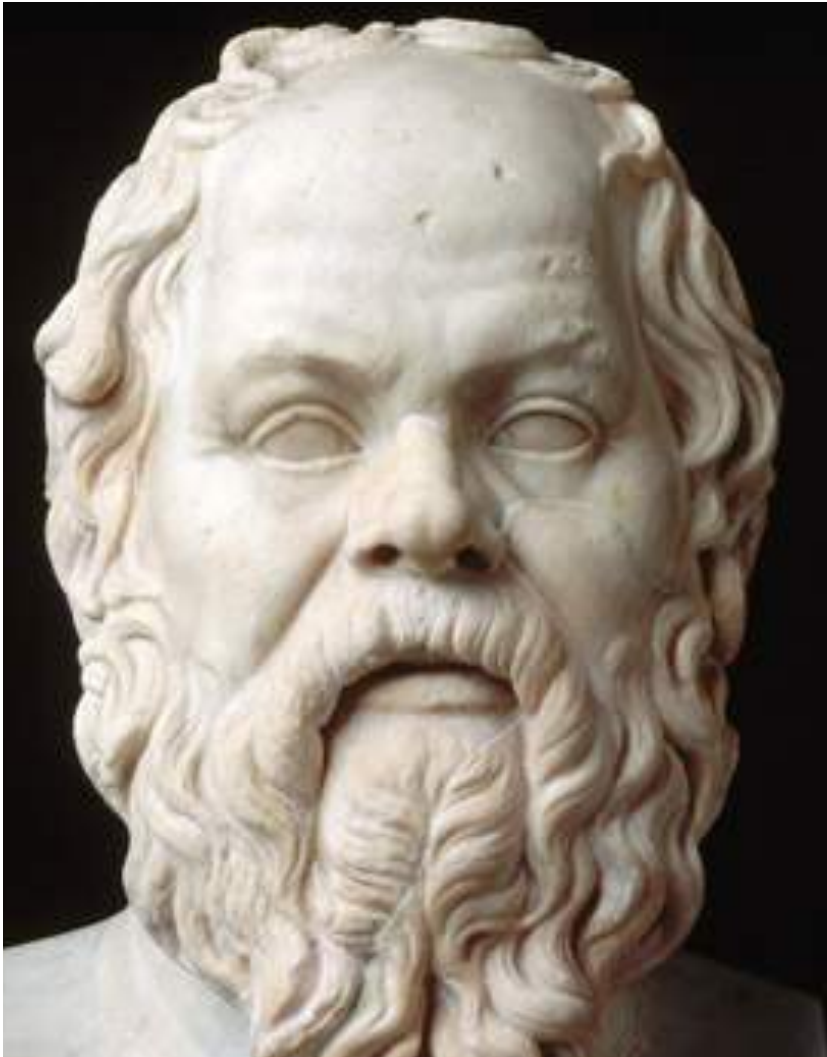
Design thinking (dschool, 2011), when used to address these complex challenges, moves back and forth, in and out, through five modes: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test always beginning with: who are we trying to help, assist, and aid?

Only once this is clarified do we define the situation by explicitly expressing what we are striving to address. Next, we focus on idea generation to create a vast repository of possibilities and then prototype to move ideas into the physical world, roughly and rapidly. Testing is iterative: the time to refine our prototypes and make thoughtful adjustments. These design thinking processes can be used in interdisciplinary, higher learning contexts to create opportunities for students to engage in vital learning experiences.

This session will provide participants with an introduction to the background and methods of design thinking and invite consideration of the ways in which these processes could be used to co-construct curriculum with 21st century learners through generative collaboration. As a pedagogical strategy, design thinking is well-suited for interdisciplinary, liberal education environments focused on exploring “wicked problems” and fostering the growth of critically reflective, engaged global citizens.

ABSTRACT 3:

**"A SOCRATIC SEMINAR WRIT LARGE": THE PEACE CORPS AND ITS VISION FOR THE LIBERAL ARTS IN THE 1960S**  
DAVID BUSCH, CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

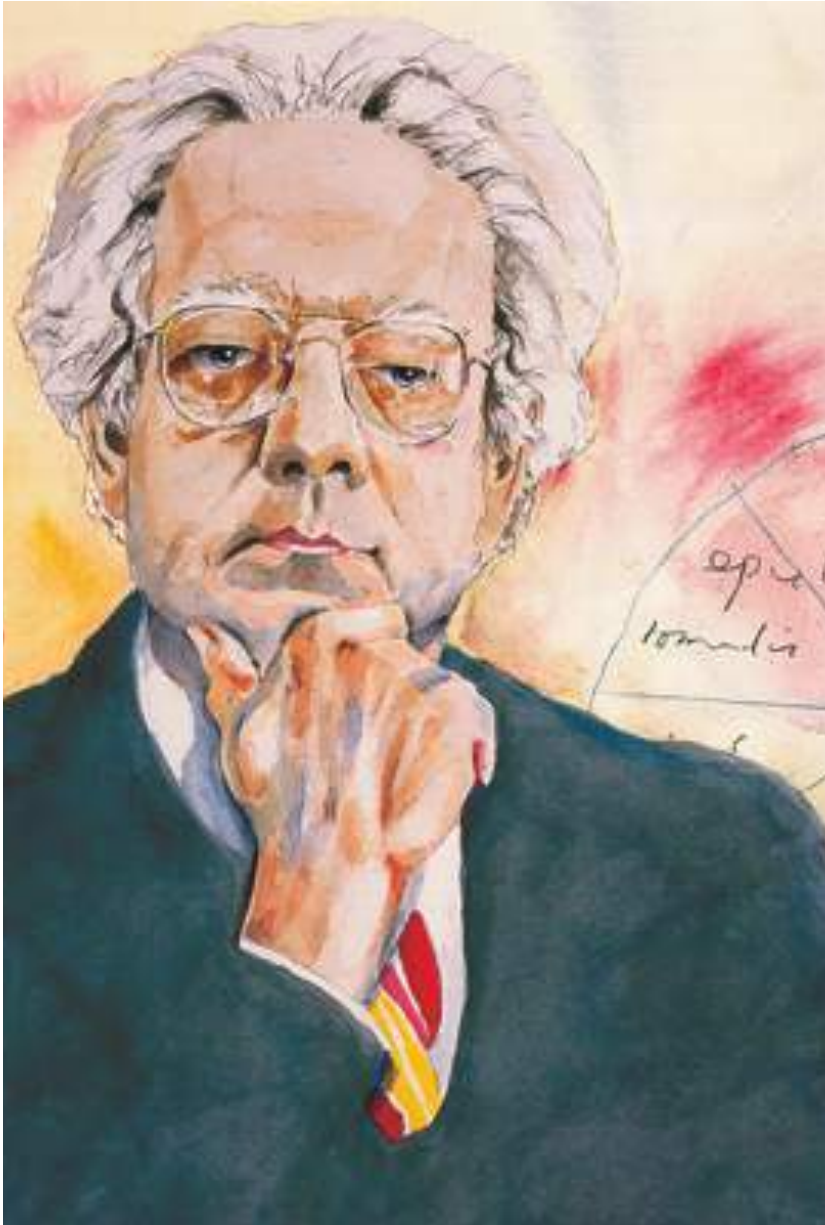


After signing the Peace Corps into law in early 1961, American President John F. Kennedy explained to audiences on NBC that Peace Corps volunteers “will learn just as much as they will teach.” One could read such a statement as merely political rhetoric, especially in the context of the Cold War when American policymakers developed new programs to win the “hearts and minds” of people in the decolonizing world. While Kennedy saw the Peace Corps through the lens of Cold War geopolitics, his reference to education reflected an important and often overlooked mission of the Peace Corps. Like other postwar exchange programs such as Eisenhower’s People-to-People program and the Fulbright-Hays Program, advocates of the Peace Corps envisioned the new program as a means of educating more democratic and globally aware citizens. In its first ten years of operation, the program partnered with eighty-seven different colleges and universities across the United States and created a training program that drew on a combination of liberal arts, the Great Books curriculum, and area studies. By the end of the decade, close to sixty thousand Americans had served abroad, the largest decade cohort to ever serve with the Peace Corps. Many of the first volunteers had just finished college, with an average age of twenty-three. When the first volunteers returned home in 1963, many drew on their experiences working in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to challenge not only their individual beliefs, but also American ideas and policy. In response to the first volunteers, Harris Wofford, the associate director of the Peace Corps, concluded that the Peace Corps represented a new vision of higher education in America. The Peace Corps was a “university in dispersion,” he explained to prospective volunteers, in which young people learn through a “Socratic seminar writ large.” Although the Peace Corps ended its partnership with colleges and universities by the end of the decade and shifted its focus to more technical aid, the history of the Peace Corps in the 1960s offers a useful lens onto different ways of rethinking the liberal arts for the 21st century. The Peace Corps in the 1960s represents a vision of the liberal arts that moves beyond the vocational-humanistic divide that often dominates political discourses and debates within higher education. By combining the Great Books and other liberal art traditions with community development training and work abroad, the Peace Corps articulated a vision of liberal arts education that saw intellectual reflection and experiences in “real world” problems as complementary elements, rather than contrasting choices.

ABSTRACT 4:

IS THERE ANYTHING LIBERATING ABOUT THE LIBERAL ARTS? A PERSONAL AND CONSERVATIVE DEFENSE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

JAMES CUNNINGHAM, INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR, QUICK THINKING TUTORING



Drawing on work from Northrop Frye, Alasdair MacIntyre, Theodor Adorno, other philosophers critiquing the nature of the university and my own experience as a university instructor, I defend the idea that the university centred on the arts and sciences is an enduring source of human freedom. As my starting point, I take the view that university is in essence the practice of educators in a community made free by their respect for what Frye calls the unforced authority of logic's valid argument, the verified scientific experiment and the compelling imagination evidenced in the arts, both liberal and fine. As such, the university expresses its ideal as a coming together of people of good will to reason with each other in aid of discovering the truth. Within this ideal, the role of Bachelor of arts/science programmes must be that of a novitiate in which students are given the opportunity to practice and master an appreciation of and respect for the authorities governing a community of educators.

While acknowledging the prima facie preposterousness of the above view to much contemporary discourse, I respond by citing Frye's perennial reminder that there is nothing easier to bully than a university. It is not novel that institutions of higher learning should betray their liberal calling to forces convinced that the university should be for something else, or mysterious that the university should be come the site of the clash between revolutionary and conformist activisms

What is important to the maintenance of the university as a liberating community is that students have the opportunity to do what it is much more difficult to do outside the university: to read deeply and broadly, think coherently, listen to instruction attentively and concentrate with some immunity to distraction and argue fairly and charitably. What is worrying, especially today, I think, is the tendency of those forces that would make the university something other than it has been AND more like the world outside, to use MacIntyre's language, to dilute the university's practice. The tools of this dilution are mainstays of hysterical modern consumer societies: what Adorno called the products of the Culture Industry. The difference, now, is that those tools (especially the electronic toys which are now mainstays in the classroom) have tended to become more efficient than they were in the past – a tendency which will continue and one that Adorno predicted. What's the solution?

Weaning students off the culture industry is difficult. But teachers fail their students and the wider educational community to which they belong if they neglect this most important aspect of educational nurture. How to do this? I offer some insights from Montessori, Anton Makarenko and Frye and again from my own practice. Is there risk associated with taking on the culture industry? Of course, there is. But living in a community always occasions risk. It's what keeps us human and free.



**ABSTRACT 5:  
IN DEFENCE OF A UTILITARIAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION  
ALLISON DUBE, MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY**

Articulations of the need university students are perceived to have for a “liberal” education, often come hand in hand with implications that this liberal education resides in a realm beyond areas assumed to be “utilitarian,” indeed, that attention on “utilitarian” concerns can only subvert a true liberal education. Novelist Marilynne Robinson warns Stanford audience against “utilitarian trends in higher education,” headlines a report in the Stanford News of that author’s Presidential lecture in the Arts and Humanities in 2015, for example; and Gerald Pillay uses the term “utilitarian fallacy” to criticize changes in funding priorities for British universities. Invocations such as these are common.

At least two questions arise from this language. One, what do people mean when they invoke the term “utilitarian” in such a context? Depending on which meaning of the word is used (and this is not always made clear), what is being argued against, and hence for, may be very different. Though that question is addressed, the bulk of this study takes a philosophical / historical approach to address a different question: to what extent do the implied woeful limitations of a utilitarian university education apply to actual accounts of a Utilitarian university education, that is to say to what the classical Utilitarian thinkers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill wrote about the subject?

Curiously, though a charter member of this school, Mill was first off the mark to criticize an emphasis on areas often invoked by the term “utilitarian,” with his assessment that Bentham could teach merely the “business part of social arrangements.” One could not assume that the visions these two had of higher education would match. And in fact it is not a straight forward matter to compare the visions. While Mill left a concrete and somewhat comprehensive statement of the role of a university (and in fact a defence of liberal education), Bentham’s view must be assembled. This account will put together a composite view from two principal sources: criticisms he made of higher learning at the time, and an extrapolation of educational principles from his proposed school, the focus of his work *Chrestomathia*.

Through the exploration of what Bentham and Mill wrote on higher education the study will, as a by-product, generate a defence of aspects of a Utilitarian undergraduate education and challenge some of the assumptions made by those who speak colloquially of the need to move “beyond” it.



**ABSTRACT 6:  
LIBERAL EDUCATION IN RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME  
RONALD PETER GLASBERG  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

The paper will attempt to address some of the key challenges of our time and how the liberal arts might be re-envisioned to address these challenges.

The first part of the presentation will outline some of these challenges: (1) the unconscious betrayal of cultural ideals and how that betrayal evolves into a destructive projection of that betrayal onto some figure or group representing the 'traitor' or betrayer; (2) the development of a pseudo-reality or dream-like socio-cultural framework that functions in a manner that reinforces the aforementioned 'treachery trope'; and (3) the quality of 'addictiveness' or compulsive repetition of uncreative behaviours designed to maintain or reinforce the structures of the pseudo-reality.

The second part of the discussion accordingly seeks to demonstrate how liberal education may be re-oriented to address the challenges outlined above. In this regard the primary thrust of liberal education may be directed toward critically assessing and reformulating the underlying principles of our globalized world with a view to revealing unconscious forms of betrayal. Are the ideals or principles inherently impractical? Do

they make betrayal of some kind both inevitable and/or too painful to face honestly? Secondly, can liberal education be directed toward strategies of 'wakefulness' that will minimize the sleep-like state associated with the creation of dream-like pseudo-realities in the socio-cultural sphere? Thirdly, can liberal education utilize the power of 'classic' texts to re-awaken the creative potential of students in such a way that addictive or compulsively repetitive practices may be replaced by ones that are both original and profound?

To sum up, the discussion of how liberal education may address current challenges in the context of an unconscious betrayal of cultural ideals is also putting forward its own pedagogical ideal – that of 'enlightenment'. While non-enlightenment may be thought of as living in a dream-like state, enlightenment in the context of liberal education may be thought of as a pedagogy of wakefulness that critically and creatively combines the external orientation of the Western sense of scientific objectivity with the internal orientation of a disciplined Buddhist subjectivity.

**ABSTRACT 7:**  
**LIBERAL EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY: CHALLENGING NEOLIBERAL CONCEPTIONS OF PEDAGOGY**  
**NAVNEET KUMAR**  
**MEDICINE HAT COLLEGE**

Wedded to the belief that market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, economic and even pedagogical decisions, neoliberalism has waged an incessant assault on democracy, public institutions, welfare state, and the idea of public good. Public institutions of higher education that would engage and encourage civic engagement are increasingly being rendered ineffective as neoliberal ideology has taken over in terms of elevating certain programs and areas, making it difficult for young people to imagine democracy and critical thinking as a public good. Democratic politics has become ineffective and impoverished as the spaces for democratic learning, debate and dialogue sustained through the liberal education stream and programs in most colleges and universities are being decoupled from the ideal of a good life. If neoliberalism fantasizes an ideal life to be led through profit-making then consumers are its most cherished citizens. Democratic values be subordinated to economic considerations, social issues be understood as unnecessary diversions, and vilification of anyone who does not buy into such an ideology are some of the characteristics of neoliberalism. Such forces have undermined the relationship between higher education and democracy.

The urgency of reclaiming the sphere of higher education in the university through liberal education has never been more pressing than ever in North America. A powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces has perpetuated a normalization of competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological success. In this paper I argue that liberal education and its various avatars in a classroom can be central to bringing the ethos of democracy back to the pedagogical sphere. Through a reading of June Jordan's "Problems of Language in a Democratic State" and Henry Giroux's "Neoliberalism as Public Pedagogy," I argue that the neoliberal version of pedagogy can be challenged and made more political and public-oriented inside a classroom space allowing us to reclaim the full effect of public pedagogy and agency. Giroux's "critical pedagogy" understood as not merely deconstructing texts but also situating politics within a broader set of relations that address what it might mean to create modes of individual and social agency that enable democratic values, finds resonance in Jordan's awareness of how we need to refuse to accommodate to the language of the powerful that perpetuates power through the censorship of dissenting views. Linking teaching to a culture of argumentation, questioning and debate enables models of citizenship, develops a sense of social responsibility, agency and aspects of democracy. Instead of perpetuating or modelling a teaching methodology, a liberal education classroom can open up spaces of resistance against and incredulity towards authority and critical thought as central to social intervention. Jordan's allusion to the Cyclops story serves as a powerful reminder of the collusion between the state and neoliberal forces and our role as educators and learners to not warp ourselves into imitations of Polyphemus's foolishness. Asking who did what to whom serves as a serious reminder and the first step that launches us into dismantling the ideology of neoliberal thought. If the Jeffersonian model of the University (where education was linked to human freedom) is to have any resonance in present times, then creating a virtuous circle of learning and a citizenry thoughtful enough to protect itself from governmental overreaching becomes imminent.



**ABSTRACT 8:**  
**NIHIL OBSTAT: THE UNIVERSITY, VISUAL ARTS AND CENSORSHIP IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES**  
**CLINT LAWRENCE**  
**MEDICINE HAT COLLEGE**

Discussion of the role of the university, the visual arts and censorship is timely. 2016 was a significant year in which political ideologies, previously not considered serious threats to liberalism, have risen in both popularity and viability.

Dissatisfaction with liberalism is challenging the political theory of “democratic consolidation”. Democratic consolidation is a theory that posits a number of conditions that are necessary for the success or continuation of the polity, namely: establishment of both democratic institutions and a civil society, as well as a basic degree of wealth. With these conditions met, the theory held that a liberal democracy was unassailable. In fact, as the electorates in Western Europe and the United States reject liberalism in favour of populism and nationalism, it is clear that liberal democracies are sure to be tested in the coming years.

The shift away from liberalism is even more alarming given that a new study which includes Australia, Britain, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States, indicates those who consider it “essential” to live in a democracy has dropped sharply, and it is lowest among young people.

The most important tenet of liberal democracy is freedom of expression because liberal democracies are what I call a “self-criticizing” political ideology. Although this term has been used by others, I define it as the notion of “critique from within”. Specifically, critique by citizens of a liberal democracy about the polity in which they live using the visual arts.

Universities are important because they provide an environment where the balance between freedom of expression and freedom from insult are discussed and where the foundation of knowledge to discuss these important issues is laid.

Visual arts are, therefore, an essential component of a liberal democracy because art and artists critique, challenge, and comment on political, social, economic, and religious issues. Artists are censored through arrest, imprisonment and violence. Artworks themselves are censored through alteration, prohibition, damage or destruction. Discussion of art and censorship in a contemporary context, demonstrates the importance of the visual arts and the university to the survival of liberal democracy.

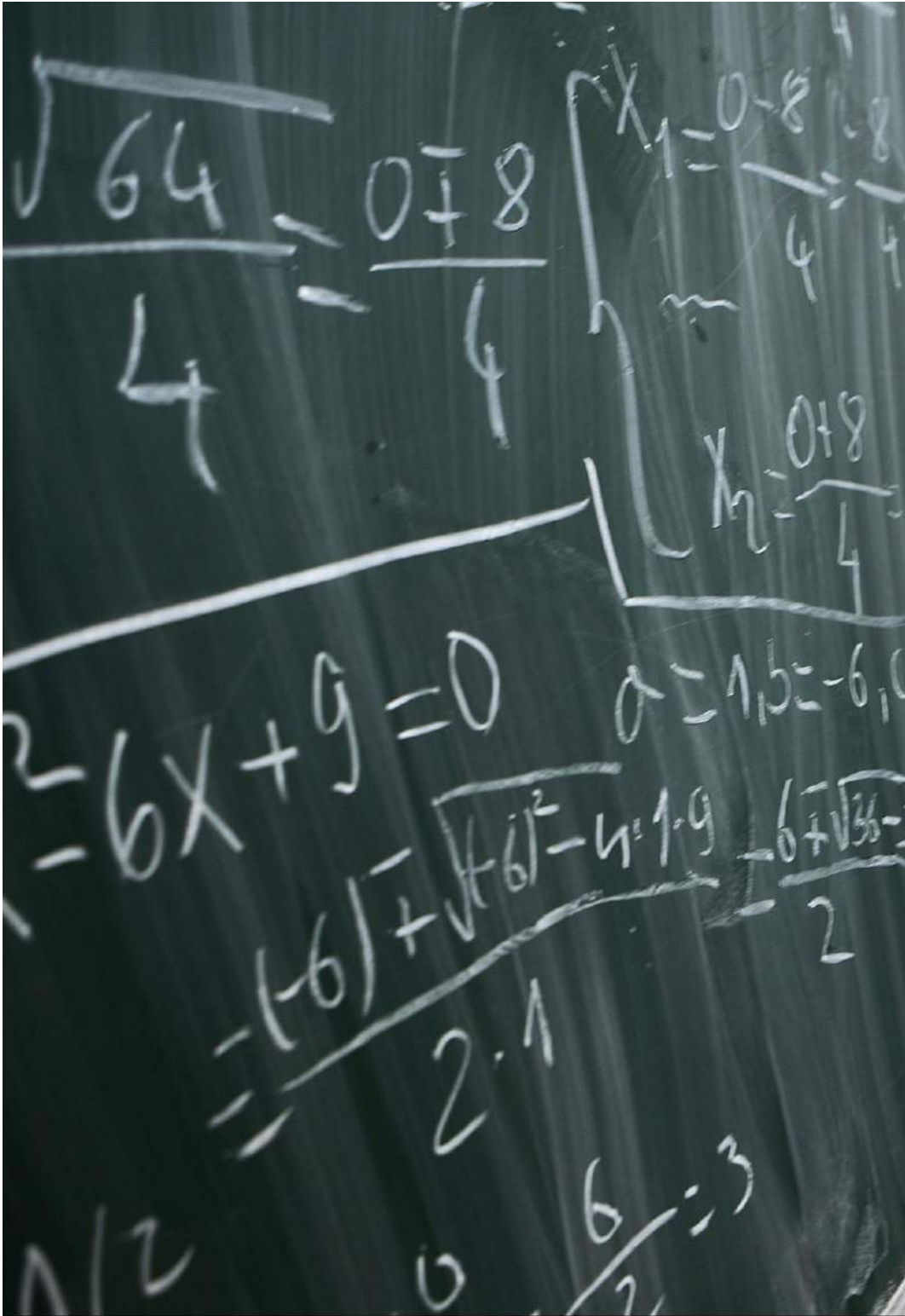


**ABSTRACT 9:  
TEACHING STATISTICS FROM A LIBERAL ARTS PERSPECTIVE  
COLLETTE LEMIEUX AND BRAD QUIRING  
MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY**

In 1992, G. W. Cobb summarized the results of an email focus group, comprised of 39 statisticians and funded by the Mathematical Association of America. The group discussed issues facing statistics education and proposed broad recommendations on how statistics can be taught, specifically in a post-secondary context. The recommendations included an emphasis on statistical thinking and a shift in focus: away from computations and towards concepts. With these recommendations began the reform movement in statistics education. These recommendations can arguably be seen as a nudge towards approaching statistics education as a liberal art: from following procedures to learning the widely applicable process of thinking statistically (Moore, 1998). Statistical thinking is defined as the thought processes, dispositions and actual processes needed to effectively do statistical investigations, which include the recognition of the need for data, the omnipresence of variation in data, and the role of chance in statistical models (Cobb, 1992; Wild & Pfannkuch, 1999).

Though it has been over two decades since these initial recommendations were made and there is some evidence of improvements in how statistics is taught, there remain obstacles to putting the reform movement's recommendations into practice (Tishkovskaya & Lancaster, 2012). Indeed, even in classrooms that incorporate these reforms, students still struggle with concepts (e.g. Dabos, 2014; Kaplan, Gabrosek, Curtiss, & Malone, 2014).

The goal of this presentation is to outline some pedagogical strategies that can be used to transform a statistics course from a traditional approach to teaching statistics (i.e. a focus on procedure) to an approach that aligns more closely with those of a liberal education (i.e. a focus on statistical thinking). We will compare how statistics is taught in a traditional way with how it is taught in a reformed way, as part of a liberal education. This includes comparing types of assessment questions and teaching strategies used by both methods. The presenters will also discuss the benefits they've seen in their classes since implementing the reform movement recommendations.



**ABSTRACT 10:  
RESISTING THE IVORY TOWER: LIBERAL EDUCATION  
AND SOCIAL CHANGE  
ROBERTA LEXIER  
MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY**

In 1960, sociologist C. Wright Mills argued that “intellectuals [are] a possible, immediate, radical agency of change.” Less than a decade later, an introduction to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* insisted that: “Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” According to both, education should be used to effect social change.

However, universities in North America are currently facing attacks from all sides of the political spectrum. In the United States, a conservative youth group has created a “Professor Watchlist” to document faculty members who “advance a radical agenda in lecture halls.” Similarly, the *Globe and Mail*’s Margaret Wentz complains that “the radicals have taken over” universities in Canada. So-called radicals, though, complain that developments within higher education, including corporatization, have threatened the ability of universities to effectively critique the world and act as a force for social change. The future of higher education is unclear.

This presentation will examine ways that liberal education can contribute to social change, including the integration of politically-driven academic disciplines, high impact pedagogies such as Community Service Learning and experiential education, and interdisciplinary approaches to social issues and problems. It will also explore the numerous limits created by institutional and societal realities to this potential role, such as safe spaces and trigger warnings, codes of conduct, casualization of the workforce, and increasing administrative oversight and surveillance. Ultimately, this presentation will offer important insights into how liberal education can be used to effect social change as well as some of the important limits placed on the ability of faculty, students, and administrators to press for change.





**ABSTRACT 11:  
THE POINT AND PLACE OF MUSIC IN LIBERAL EDUCATION AT THE 21ST CENTURY UNIVERSITY  
GUY OBRECHT  
MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY**

Art music is particularly suited to study in the context of liberal education in the 21st century because at its best it never has any utility. It is not without connection to the economy or to the various facets of society that make up an art world, but these connections are secondary to the conditions internal to the music. What we value about music is its very lack of utility: its disconnected, nebulous and underdetermined qualities.

In the overdetermined context of the 21st century, where online reference texts are considered to be the limit of knowledge and music is ground into digital streams that imply a singular mode or frame of listening, the study of art music is a particularly valuable challenge. By requiring an intellectual engagement with undetermined yet formally and structurally consistent musical phenomena, students are introduced to a

world where they have agency, where a text will not direct them to the right answer, and where the lack of utility enables the nexus of value.

The fundamental challenge is how to get a student who is essentially musically illiterate to engage with a tradition that is based in texts and craft. How can students interact with a system that they do not know? In this paper I present an answer that involves a threefold process of understanding musical elements conceptually, bodily, and practically in the literature. Through this method students can understand how music can question our expectations and give us critical perspective on our place in the world.



**ABSTRACT 12:**  
**PEER INFLUENCE ON THE MORAL REASONING OF BUSINESS STUDENTS: WHY LIBERAL EDUCATION MATTERS**  
**DAVID OHREEN**  
**MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY**

Liberal education is often undervalued by business schools, in part, because tailored professional training squeezes out broader educational components, like the humanities and social sciences, for programmatic efficiency. This is a mistake. I present the findings from a mixed methods study that provides preliminary support for a peer dialogue approach to teaching and learning Business Ethics. First, this study demonstrates the positive effects of the benefits of group discussions on students' ability to comprehend complex ethical scenarios in business, the students' ability to discuss and arrive at a consensus regarding these scenarios, and make ethical decisions themselves. Second,

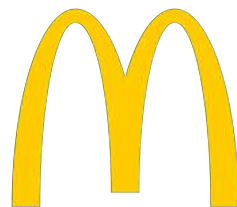
group discussion, with the aid of structured questions, can improve student understanding of ethical concepts. Third, groups that are diverse—are made up of members from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds—have higher levels of moral reasoning. The implication of the latter are profound. It suggests that business students can benefit from a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives, through the use of programmed liberal educational courses, as part of their business degree. In short, liberal education can improve business student's moral reasoning and act as an antidote to unethical business practices.

**ABSTRACT 13:**  
**FROM MOBY-DICK TO MCDONALD'S: AMERICANISM, ANTI-AMERICANISM, AND AMERICAN STUDIES**  
**MARIO REWERS**  
**VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY**

My paper examines the educational work of American Studies programs in the United States and the ways in which it shifted from the 1930s, when these programs became first established in the academy, to the 1990s, when they were lambasted by a younger generation of scholars as intellectually dubious expressions of Cold War politics. Based on archival research in institutional records and personal papers, I investigate the politics of the various parties involved in these programs, including the academics who were affiliated with them, the administrators who established them at universities, and the government and philanthropic organizations which provided funding for them.

I use these materials to trace the oftentimes ambivalent relationship between academics and their object of study—between Americanists and America—as a process that can be depicted as a quest for legitimacy. On the one hand, this phrase describes the attempt by intellectuals and academics associated with the American Studies movement to establish American art and literature as legitimate objects of study, a view that until the 1940s was still controversial. On the other hand, it also describes the attempt of the field to legitimize itself by claiming to provide the most adequate way to study these objects. In order to become a scholarly field as well as an institutional presence, American Studies had to position itself on a contested field of competing disciplines vying for prestige and funding. While this situation was not unique to American Studies, it was particularly pronounced in its case due to the fact that it was openly interdisciplinary, drawing intentionally from neighboring disciplines like history and literary studies for its methods. Moreover, the field also had to legitimize itself as being capable of disinterested academic inquiry at all. Because of the proximity between American Studies and its object of study, scholars in the field frequently felt the need to prove to themselves and to others that they were not merely spokespeople for the American government and its domestic and international interests. In this way, American Studies had to justify its existence not just in light of the fact that it had many points of overlap with disciplines that were already part of the academic establishment, but it also had to show that it was capable of producing scholarship and avoiding propaganda.

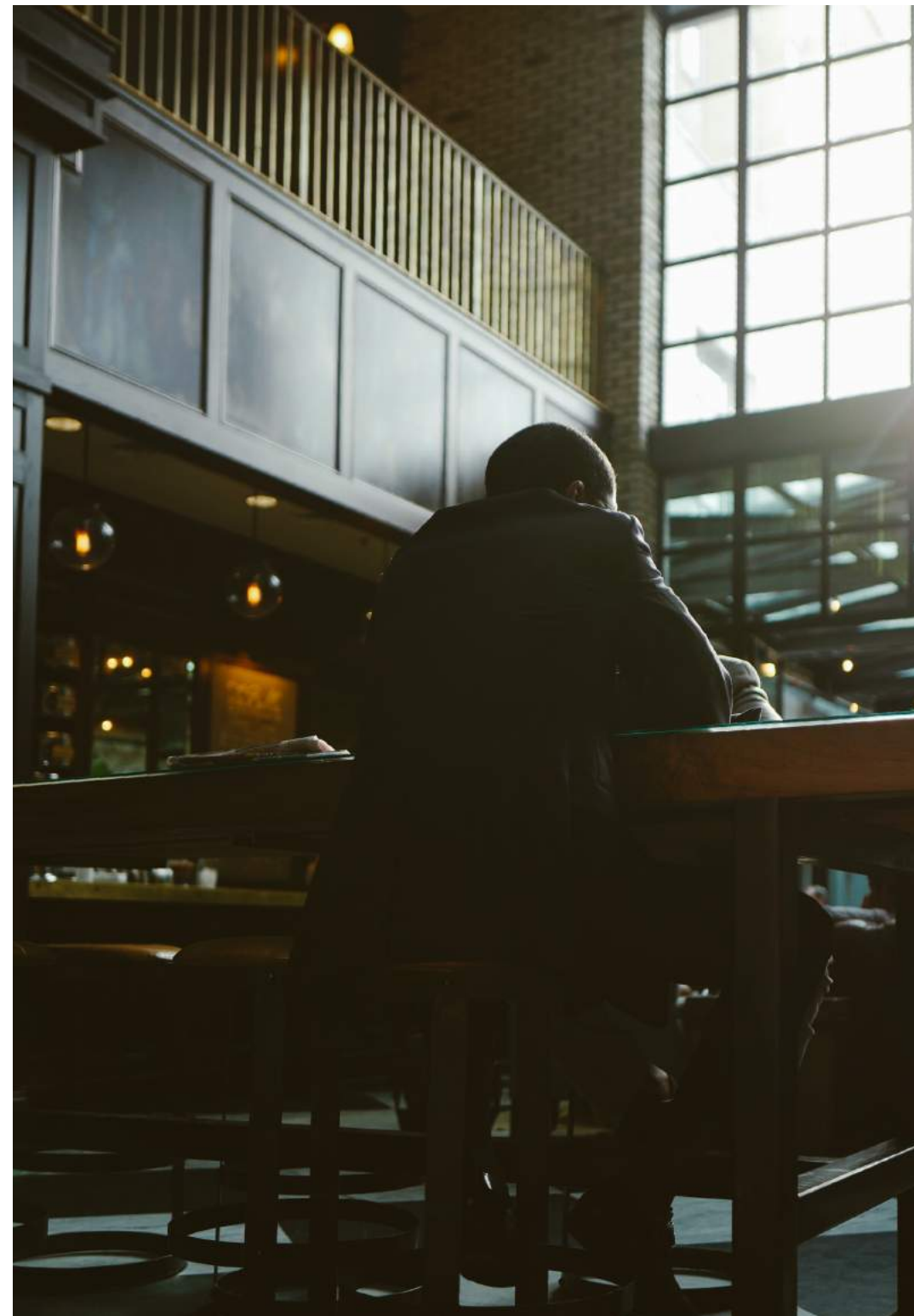
By focusing on the ways in which American Studies managed to legitimize itself as a field of teaching and research, my project brings together theories from the sociology of knowledge with techniques from intellectual history to examine how societies produce and legitimize knowledge about themselves. Tracing the trajectory of American Studies as a key object for thinking about academic and political culture, my paper offers new perspectives on the humanities during the Cold War, on the process of discipline formation, and on recent debates about the function of the liberal arts in heterogeneous societies.

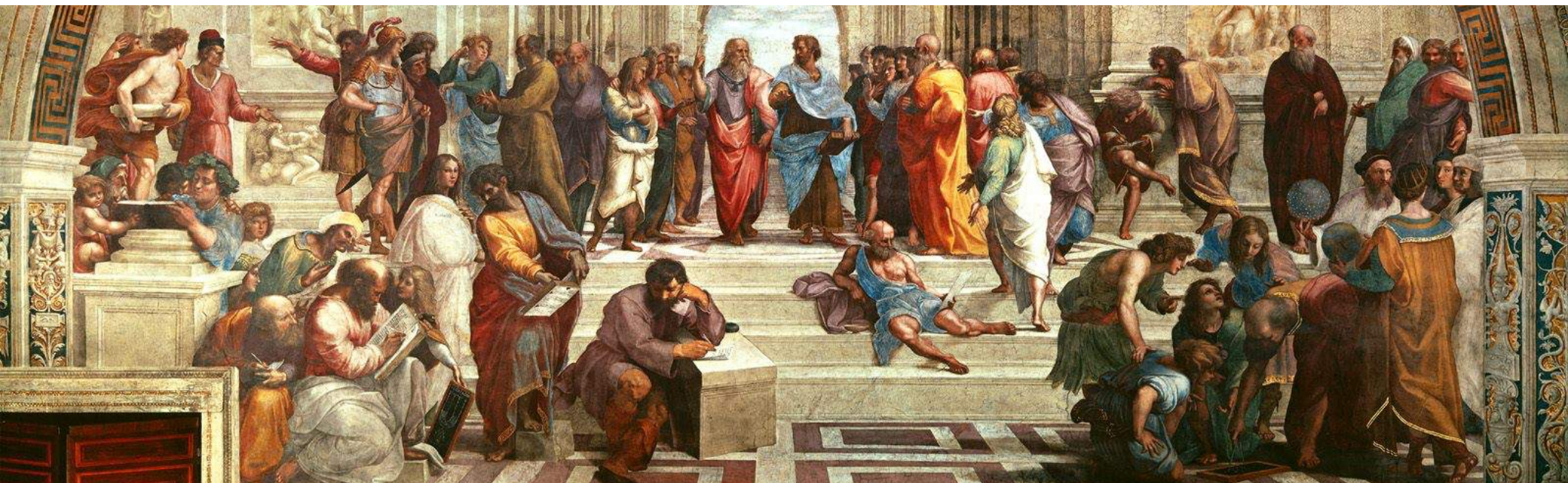


ABSTRACT 14:  
CONCEPTUALIZING LIBERAL EDUCATION WHILE BUILDING  
COMPETENCIES AND CAPACITIES WITH FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS  
GLEN RYLAND AND MICHAEL SAUVÉ  
MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY

*“Their object is not to make skillful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings.” ~ John Stuart Mill, Inaugural Address at the University of St. Andrews, 1867*

In the winter semester 2017, two Mount Royal University instructors collaborated in a course that aims to foster competencies and capacities students need for their university education. As an experiment, the instructors integrated curriculum that explored the meaning and purpose of the university, including voices of dissent that challenge the traditions of liberal education. This session will provide a reflection by the instructors on their experience and future steps for introducing university students to liberal education.





#### ABSTRACT 15:

### WHY THE WORLD NEEDS MORE PHILOSOPHERS: LIBERAL EDUCATION AND PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

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The question addressed in this paper is how to reinvigorate the role of the university in society through the education and cultivation of public intellectuals. It argues that the growing specialization of disciplines within universities has narrowed the role and credibility of 21st Century academics who venture into the public realm, and that liberal education and interdisciplinary philosophical training as the foundation of all disciplinary and professional education is the antidote to this dilemma.

From the establishment of the first universities in North America through most of the 20th Century, the Humboldtian model, with a strong dose of Cardinal Newman's idea of a liberal education, dominated the higher education landscape in the US and Canada. Until the time of Humboldt, European universities did not distinguish between the arts and sciences; only well into the 19th Century were the natural sciences taught as discrete subjects in the universities and the social sciences did not emerge until the late 19th and early 20th Century. The mother body of knowledge from the time of the ancient Greeks was philosophy, which spawned the original seven liberal arts of rhetoric, grammar, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. The natural sciences evolved from natural philosophy and the social sciences from social philosophy.

The intellectuals of the Humboldtian era wrote and commented on issues of broad public import, from backgrounds of study and experience that encompassed history, law, theology, commerce, physics, aesthetics, etc., and all are described among other things as "philosophers." In the 20th Century, as disciplinary specialization increased, many thought leaders narrowed the focus of their contributions.

We need to consider how to reconstitute the spawning ground of the public intellectual: which means breaking down the silos of specialization. We need more vibrant philosophy programs that reconsolidate the disparate fields and perspectives now segregated into dozens of disciplines, and that look beyond narrow British and Continental European perspectives to embrace global, gender-specific, and Indigenous epistemologies. We need to offer our students more interdisciplinary programs that address the major issues of our time, while encouraging and supporting interdisciplinary research among our faculty. We need our students to think of themselves as philosophers, in the broadest interdisciplinary sense, while acquiring a depth of knowledge that gives them substance.

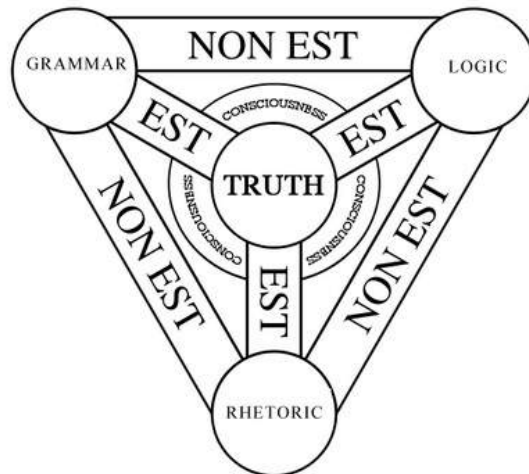
**ABSTRACT 16:**  
**THE CIVIC BENEFITS OF THE TRIVIUM**  
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At any given moment, people are surrounded by cultural output. The majority of the material produced is ephemeral—it is consumed and soon forgotten. Other parts of the material produced finds its way into a wider societal fabric and is kept current by its continual renewal. The process by which the decision of what material is *kultur* and what is *kitsch* appears to be a “black box”—material enters the box and is sorted, but the mechanism and criteria are neither seen nor understood. Items are proclaimed as “good” by “critics” with the loudest, or most repeated, voices winning the debate.

Some of this material takes the form of “news.” Social media has allowed for the rapid dissemination, and sharing, of “news” from both “reputable” and “non-reputable” sources. It has been suggested that this sharing of “news” has affected recent elections by both spreading false information and by convincing others to opt out of the electoral process. Individuals also use “news,” consciously or unconsciously, to guide the creation of coherent selves. Whereas cultural material enters into a societal black box, news enters into a personal black box. Deciding what is “reputable news” is a subjective matter which deals more with self-resonance than triangulation of sources (checking the facts of story against several outlets). Thus what is decided to be reputable news takes on rhetorical function of the correlation between an individual’s beliefs and a source’s ideology and is based more upon personal valuation than conformity to objective reality.

The liberal arts, if they are going to have meaning to individuals, must be shown to have personal significance. The liberal arts needs to consider the culture on hand, in all its forms, and help individuals navigate that culture. Individuals need the liberal arts to help find values that assist them in constructing their own “black box” to determine the worth of the cultural materials they encounter, including news. It is here that the *trivium*, could play an important role. By focusing on grammar, rhetoric and logic, the liberal arts can give individuals the tools they need to determine how to critically evaluate the information to which they are exposed to and to which they choose to expose themselves. The trivium gives the skills to make value judgments critically. We cannot and should not limit this education to only those in colleges and universities. The liberal arts need to reach beyond post-secondary institutions and back into the secondary institutions. The question becomes how to do this.

This paper will examine the issue of news selection and the effect this may have played in recent elections. It will briefly talk about identity formation and resonance. It will focus on how instruction of the subjects of the *trivium* can address these issues and will propose how the trivium can be taught in secondary schools using existing frameworks and structures.



ABSTRACT 17:  
IS CRITICAL THINKING PART OF LIBERAL EDUCATION?  
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Universities (particularly in the US) have for decades faced a reduction in public support, and in response have shifted more of the cost of a college education onto students and parents, with the predictable result that they look with suspicion at any courses which are not explicitly part of a major or do not otherwise contribute to an intended career. This cost-shifting has curricular implications: universities are facing pressures to make the curriculum more pragmatic, with the result being a reduction in emphasis on courses in the humanities in favour of applied programs (STEM, business, nursing, etc.), with a corresponding shift in majors. In response, traditional academic disciplines have tried to counter this trend by stressing the pragmatic value of non-pragmatic knowledge, and by foregrounding the more arguably practical aspects of their programs (e.g., composition and technical writing in English departments, and informal logic in philosophy).

In this context, goals of liberal education such as logic and reasoning have sometimes been transmuted to "critical thinking," a phrase having an assortment of sometimes contradictory definitions, but often treated in terms of accumulating skills--repeatable and generalizable procedures which do not require agency of the person addressed, but rather a relatively simple application of procedures. "Critical thinking includes the component skills of analyzing arguments, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, and making decisions or solving problems." (Harris) One critical thinking textbook announces its intention to be "imparting a set of skills and habits" rather than "teaching bits of theory" (Hunter). Book titles often include skills in their titles: Think Smarter: Critical Thinking To Improve Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Skills; Effective Strategies That Will Make You Improve Critical Thinking and Decision Making Skills (Critical Thinking, Logical Thinking, Organization); Critical Thinking: Proven Strategies To Improve Decision Making Skills, Increase Intuition And Think Smarter; and Critical Thinking Skills for Dummies.

Conceiving of critical thinking as the accumulation of skills is the opposite of liberal education, which is supposed to be devoted to the disinterested pursuit of truth, without reference to practical value. Skills brings with it a conceptual frame positing thinking as mechanistic. A key element of critical thinking, the crisis which makes it exigent in the first place, is thus negated, along with the possibility of questioning the system which defines the problems to be confronted, as well as the opportunity for self-criticism and reconsideration of one's own beliefs and attitudes. In order to become fully part of liberal education, critical thinking needs to move beyond this conceptual limitation: "Critical thinking is sterile without the capacity for empathy and comprehension that stretches the self." (Roth 184)





**ABSTRACT 18:  
THE EVOLUTION OF LIBERAL EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE  
SHELLY L. WISMATH, JAN NEWBERRY & HEATHER MIRAU  
UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE**

The University of Lethbridge was founded in 1967 as an undergraduate Liberal Education institution, and in the University's early decades the Liberal Education philosophy permeated our program requirements and pedagogy. Over time, our degree requirements moved from almost total freedom for students to choose what they wanted to study, to breadth requirements put in place to ensure that students took courses from each of Sciences, Social Sciences and Fine Arts/Humanities lists. Our vision of breadth encompassed sciences as well as the traditional humanities focus, although our professional schools were excluded from the lists. As the academic environment changed in the 1990s and 2000s, with more emphasis on research and a growing graduate program, the focus on Liberal Education slipped, with breadth requirements becoming the status quo.

A Liberal Education Revitalization Team (LERT) was formed by our Provost in 2013 with a 3-pronged mandate: 1) establish and emphasize a fuller four-pillar model of Liberal Education, 2) promote this model widely to students, faculty, staff and community, and 3) propose a sustainable governance model for Liberal Education. This talk by three of the Revitalization Team members will describe this revitalization process, and the societal, institutional and pedagogical structures which have made it successful to date. In particular, we will discuss the four-pillar model with the recent inclusion of courses from the professional Faculties on our breadth lists, the dedicated Liberal Education courses we teach, and the skills and attributes that liberally educated university graduates offer as citizens in an increasingly complex and globalized world.

ABSTRACT 19:  
SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY IN THE MOVIE *LIMITLESS* (2011): A  
CONTEMPORARY CASE STUDY OF KNOWLEDGE  
CONSTRUCTION  
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This paper addresses issues relating to liberal education by focusing on the nature of knowledge. Granted that liberal education cannot ignore prevalent and common views on knowledge in the contemporary world, it uses the 2011 blockbuster movie *Limitless* (directed by Neil Burger) as an example of how knowledge is currently conceptualized. The underlying assumption of this study is that movies, as products of popular culture, reflect and reinforce established ideas and opinions of particular societies.

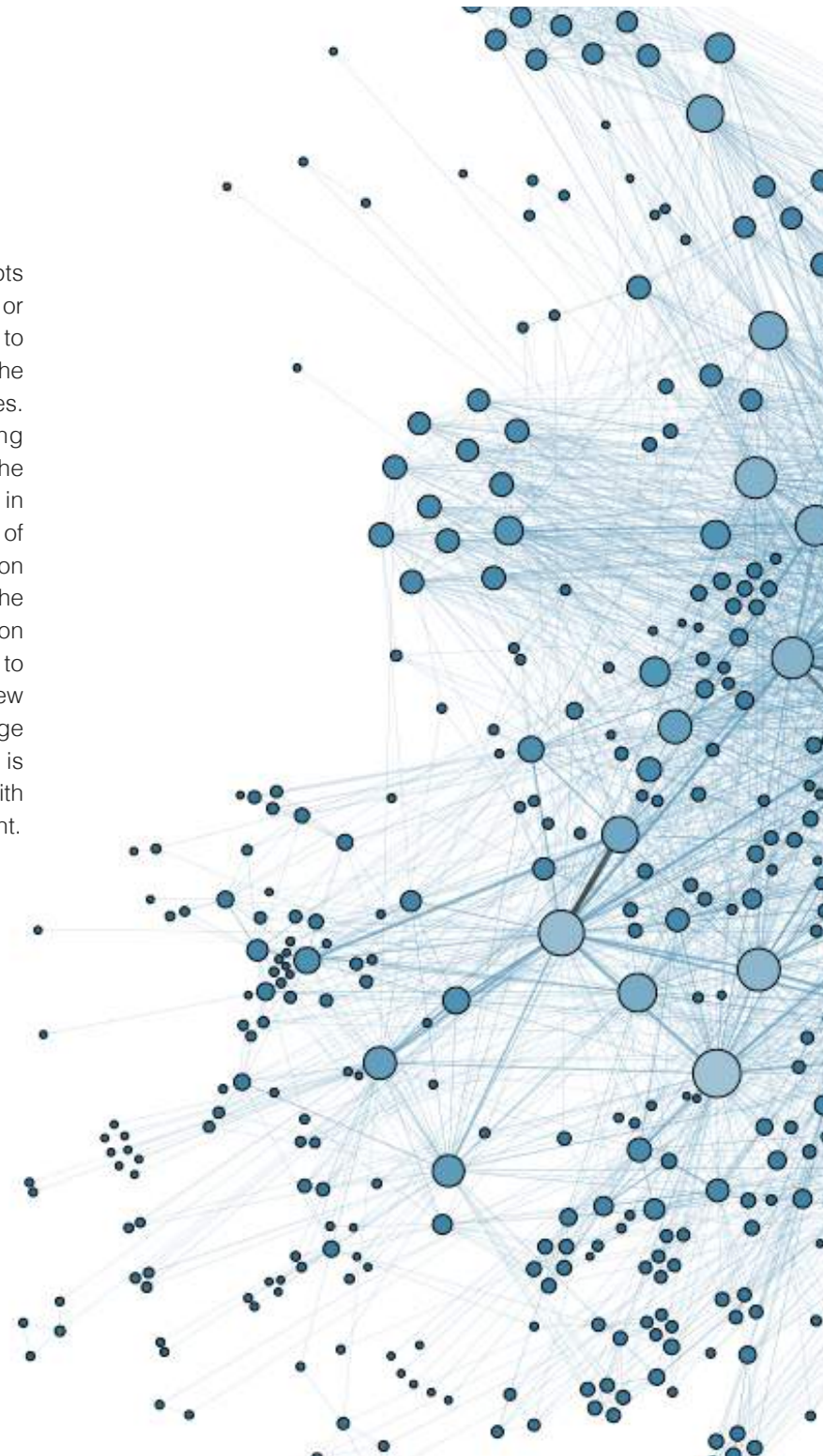
In the movie, the new drug known as NZT is seen to be able to enhance the mental abilities of its users dramatically. This allows the protagonist of the movie, Eddie Morra (Bradley Cooper), to perform a number of amazing deeds. In addition to this, his enhanced faculties appear to permit him to claim that he knows certain things to be true. This paper uses this as the starting point of the discussion and examines how knowledge-claims are conceptualized and legitimized in contemporary society. I argue that knowledge, as it is understood in *Limitless*, has been mechanized and metaphorically turned into a product of technology. Not only will this process raise important questions regarding the statuses of explanation and justification in relation to knowledge-claims, it can also impact on how one sees the connection between knowledge and teaching. If liberal education is to fulfill its emancipatory potentials, this mechanized and partial take on knowledge deserves to be examined critically.

To offer contrast to the model of knowledge presented in the film *Limitless*, the ideas of British philosopher R. F. Holland (1923-2013) will be discussed. Holland follows Plato's view that the issue of what qualifies as knowledge has to be understood with reference to whether it is teachable. As Holland's view on knowledge highlights the social and communal dimensions of knowledge, it can serve as a useful reminder regarding how values are embedded in knowledge- construction.



**ABSTRACT 20:  
VISUALIZING KNOWLEDGE: THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF VISUALIZING  
ABSTRACT THINKING  
KARIM YOUSSEF, MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY &  
MAGID W.F. YOUSSEF, ARCHITECT AND INDEPENDENT  
RESEARCHER**

The paper explores the potential of using the animation of abstract images to depict scientific concepts and their development. The aim behind using abstract images is arriving at a universal language or visual coding for conceptualizing relationships and their transformations. Such a codification may lead to the unification of knowledge from different disciplines and contribute to interdisciplinary thinking. At the same time, such a codification may also bring out specificities of disciplinary knowledge divergences. The usefulness of visual abstract thinking and its codification would be in systematizing problem-framing, and in generating heuristic solutions. Such a visual approach places the role of the Fine Arts at an equal level, if not higher, with that of STEM subjects, given that both need creativity in problem-solving. Markedly, the 'higher' level of the Fine Arts would be attributed to the higher ability of visual abstract thinking to synthesize conceptual relations, as opposed to the focus of STEM subjects on merely analyzing relations. The implication of adopting a formalized visual thinking approach is the advancement of knowledge by bringing different disciplines on a shared platform, using a common language. It also allows for the ease of transferability of conceptualizations from one discipline to another, and aid in conceptual development within a host discipline. It will also help in generating new hypotheses for empirical testing, and facilitate the construction of homologous theories that could bridge seemingly disparate concepts. The idea of using abstract images to capture a concept's development is applied to a sample of scholarly journal articles demonstrating the power of visual representation with potential to extrapolate forecasted theories or ideas and capture the landscape of concept development.



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Natasha Bakht, University of Ottawa



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