
The Pursuit of Freedom through the Spirit of Inquiry: The St. Norbert College Liberal Arts Identity Statement

FROM OUR FOUNDING TO OUR FUTURE

From its earliest days, St. Norbert College has been dedicated to providing its students with, in the words of our Mission Statement, “an educational environment that fosters intellectual,

AN EDUCATION WITH RANGE AND DEPTH

The concept of the *artes liberales* goes back to Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle through the idea of *enkuklios paideia*, encyclopedic learning or “learning in a circle,” trying to encompass and comprehend as much of the world as one can. A liberal arts education leads us to an enlightened appreciation for the physical, natural, and human worlds. As we marvel at each new discovery, our grounding in inductive reasoning, deductive logic, and the scientific method empowers us to critically evaluate what we learn. We also observe the power of these methodologies in elucidating the patterns of human behavior, enterprise, and culture. In all contexts, we appreciate the value of a well-designed empirical study. As the collective body of human knowledge increases, the liberal arts tradition calls on us to look for the broader implications of each discovery and consider the ethical deployment of each emergent technology. Our appreciation of diverse cultures further primes us to anticipate the effects of innovation on communities other than our own. Our liberal arts training equips us to view each new discovery not with bewilderment, but with wisdom, humility and awe. Sharing this tradition with our students helps them achieve both a fundamental and an expansive understanding of the complex process of living in and contributing to our world.

The St. Norbert conception of the liberal arts experience extends beyond the classroom. The

cultivation of mind and spirit and character involves our interactions with our students, and their interactions among themselves at a level which integrates their studies with the skills essential to community life. St. Norbert College is devoted to the Norbertine spirit of *communio*, for learning is done best with and for others, united in the common enterprise of serving humankind.

A devoted study of the liberal arts serves to train the mind, enliven the spirit, and cultivate our ethical sensibilities. In tandem with the practical and technical arts such as medicine, law, commerce, or digital technologies, it trains students for success in a profession but also inspires them to be thoughtful and caring citizens. The practical may also *liberate*, in that it leads to ways to make a living and contribute to one’s community. Liberal is practical, and practical should be liberal. All disciplines that support freedom of inquiry, citizenship, and development of the whole person contribute to and participate in the liberal arts.

The spirit of liberal learning flourishes at St. Norbert College, inspiring us as teachers, scholars, and practitioners of our various crafts. It is with firm conviction that we embrace the liberal arts tradition as the foundation stone of a free and just society and confident in its power to inspire each new generation of students with the values of free inquiry, a love of learning, and responsible citizenship.