

Call for Proposals

Knowledge in Crisis: Liberal Learning in a “Post-Truth” Age

The Seventeenth Annual Conversation on the Liberal Arts

March 22–24, 2018

The Gaede Institute for the Liberal Arts, Westmont College

Santa Barbara, CA

The Gaede Institute for the Liberal Arts is pleased to announce the seventeenth annual Conversation on the Liberal Arts, to be held Thursday to Saturday, March 24–26, 2018, on the campus of Westmont College. The 2018 Conversation theme is “Knowledge in Crisis: Liberal Learning in a ‘Post-Truth’ Age.”

We live in a moment when disputes about knowledge and truth—always at home in the academy—have broken out dramatically into our wider society. Shared sources of information and standards for credibility seem to have evaporated. Once-esteemed academic institutions, scientific enterprises, and media organizations are routinely dismissed as politicized engines of propaganda. Trust in the expertise, the professionalism, and the simple good faith of those with differing views seems increasingly rare.

How did we get here, and what is our way forward? Can the fragmentation of our society into closed and competing information camps be repaired? Can trust in shared sources of information be restored? What pedagogical practices or curricular strategies nurture a critical spirit without engendering mistrust and insularity? And what contribution should the liberal arts enterprise make in this moment?

“Liberal Learning in a ‘Post-Truth’ Age” will gather scholars, administrators, students, and practitioners to consider how the tools of liberal education can help us navigate the changing landscape of knowledge. We invite full panels and individual papers on themes including, but not limited to:

- The importance of social context for communicating trustworthiness and constituting knowledge;
- Historical perspectives on truth, media, expertise and authority, or other relevant subjects;
- The state of contemporary journalism, including assessment of its impact and models for its future;
- Information literacy in a digital age, especially as it pertains to the undergraduate academic experience;
- Formal theories of knowledge and their applicability to our current epistemic situation, or to a broad educational curriculum;
- The interaction of technology and new media with knowledge, cognition, and social discourse;
- The power of extralinguistic modes of communication, including the visual arts, music, design, and advertising;
- The psychology of knowledge, or the biological limits of rationality;
- Communication across cultural divides (academic, sociopolitical, geographic, racial, religious, or other);
- Science communication and science skepticism—or, more broadly, the interface between academia and its various publics;
- Curricular strategies, pedagogical practices, or academic contexts that encourage the critical pursuit and careful use of knowledge;
- Any issues emerging from particular fields in the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities relevant to the acquisition or transmission of knowledge and accessible to an interdisciplinary audience.

Who Should Attend?

- Scholars from any discipline whose work explores knowledge, truth, facts, information, argument and related concepts—their creation, their critique, their dissemination, their use and abuse—and artists exploring these issues in their creative work.
- Academic administrators and faculty exploring curricular and pedagogical strategies for fostering healthy critical—and self-critical—skills;
- Scientists, journalists, and others engaged in public discourse about sometimes polarizing topics;
- Undergraduate or graduate students who are emerging scholars of these issues or practitioners in these areas;
- Anyone with an interest in the value and practice of liberal education.

Format

One of the highlights of the Conversation on the Liberal Arts, as the name suggests, is the rich discussion it promotes. Plenary sessions include full-length paper presentations and extended times of conversation. Concurrent sessions are devoted primarily to open discussion of papers, which are distributed in advance. We ask concurrent authors to give very brief (3-5 minute) precis of their work, leaving most of the time for unscripted interaction.

Submissions

Please submit either a 350-word abstract or a completed paper (maximum 25 pages in English, and including a short abstract) to libarts@westmont.edu. All standard academic citation and formatting styles will be accepted, but Chicago is preferred. Be sure to include: 1) First author's full name, academic rank or job title, name of institution or organization, and contact information—mail, phone, and email; 2) Full names, ranks or titles, and institutions/organizations of all co-authors; 3) Title of abstract or paper. We encourage student submissions, which should be identified as such. Please inquire about discounted student registration rates.

The deadline for submitting a proposal is November 29, 2017. If accepted, full papers should be submitted by February 26, 2018. Please contact Aaron Sizer (asizer@westmont.edu, 805-565-6124) with any questions.

For more information on the Conversation on the Liberal Arts, visit westmont.edu/conversation.