

Call for Proposals

High Anxiety: Liberal Arts and the Race to Success

The Eighteenth Annual Conversation on the Liberal Arts

March 21–23, 2019

The Gaede Institute for the Liberal Arts, Westmont College

Santa Barbara, CA

The Gaede Institute is pleased to announce the eighteenth annual *Conversation on the Liberal Arts*, to be held March 21–23, 2019, on the campus of Westmont College. The 2019 *Conversation* theme is “High Anxiety: Liberal Arts and the Race to Success.”

Today’s undergraduate students are under more stress than ever—we know that empirically, and we know that from our own experience with students. And anxiety *in* college is often the product of years of anxiety *about* college—getting the right grades, participating in the right extracurriculars, choosing the right school, all with the purpose of attaching a prestigious institution to one’s name and resume.

Liberal arts undergraduate education should be an antidote to these anxieties—a chance (perhaps *the* chance) to wrestle with the big questions, a time when young people can benefit from learning for its own sake. But having known academic life as what one critic calls “a high-stakes, twelve-year sprint,” students understandably have trouble slowing down to enjoy, and to be formed by, the kind of broad exploration that liberal education offers.

What is the place of liberal education when college has been reduced to the most important leg of a utilitarian race to “success”? What pedagogical techniques, curricular strategies, or co-curricular programs will enable students on the fast track to realize the formative potential of their undergraduate years? What practical measures will mitigate students’ short-term fears, and address the more existential fears they perhaps point toward? Might the liberal arts even redirect and redeem students’ anxieties, offering healing for young people who have experienced life as one long race to the next thing? The eighteenth annual Conversation on the Liberal Arts will gather scholars, administrators, students, and practitioners to consider these questions and more.

We invite full panels and individual papers on themes including, but not limited to:

- contemporary economic and social realities that shape the undergraduate experience, especially by increasing the apparent cost of academic or professional “failure”;
- special challenges confronting students from less-privileged backgrounds as they seek access to college and a sense of belonging and thriving once there;
- recent increases in student mental-health concerns, and how those concerns affect students’ lives inside the classroom and out;
- curricular and co-curricular collaborations that can enhance mutual understanding of the student experience, educational priorities, and formational goals;
- students’ self-knowledge and sense of identity, especially as these are shaped by academic performance, career aspiration and attainment, home context, and social media;
- strategies for framing, conveying, and embodying the inherent value of learning;
- advantages and liabilities of a liberal-arts model—in curricular structure, pedagogy, community life, or any other dimension—for addressing the above problems.

Who should attend?

- Faculty who are concerned about the cost of “success anxiety” for their students’ well-being, or who have sought to intervene in that experience;
- Administrators who wish to support student thriving, in academic, mental-health, or other capacities;
- Student-life professionals who daily encounter students’ identity and success narratives and the anxieties they engender;
- Undergraduate and graduate students whose work or life gives them perspective on the pressures of college and career;
- 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) précis 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. All student work should be clearly identified as such.

The deadline for submitting a proposal is December 17, 2018. If accepted, full papers should be submitted by February 25, 2019. 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.