

The Unique and Significant Contributions of the Humanities

In 1988, “The National Council for Occupational Education (NCOE) and the Community College Humanities Association established the Shared Vision Task Force to examine the potential contributions of the humanities to occupational degree programs” (Cox 1). The following table lists the “unique and significant contributions of the humanities” (Cox 50-52) that were used in the pilot project to improve the student learning outcomes of students enrolled in Associate in Applied Science degree programs. The goals of the project were to help students develop four skills required by the workplace:

1. Working with Others
2. Solving Problems
3. Making Decisions
4. Adapting to Change (Cox 15)

Humanities courses were deemed to provide unique contributions to student learning outcomes that were not provided by technical training alone. [*Italics are added below.*]

<p>CONTRIBUTION 1. An appreciation for what is significant about human life – past, present, and projections for the future.</p>	<p>If people are to be effective in <i>working with other and in solving problems</i> together, they need to understand one another, and specifically, to understand what human beings have which distinguishes them from other living beings and from institutions. In solving problems which humans face in ways that will satisfy the needs of human beings, it is essential to understand what people have historically held as valuable, worthy, and desirable. It is of great importance for truly effective and efficient problem-solving that there be an understanding of how humans have approached problems in the past, what has been achieved, what have been recurring difficulties, what present attempts are begin made to address these problems, and what the future might hold in store given present trends and the continuing fundamental set of human needs. Understanding where we have come from, what we are presently about and our future aspirations is absolutely vital in working with people to achieve common purposes.</p>
<p>CONTRIBUTION 2. The ability to understand and empathize with others through the development of an understating of human needs and problems.</p>	<p>In <i>working with people and having others work for you</i>, it is essential that there be an appreciation of the perspectives of others – perspectives which include their past, their hopes for the future, their problems and their basic needs. Barriers are often erected between people by jargon, argot, technical knowledge and social roles. Technical and professional education often works against the development of such a skill when it encourages individuals to think of themselves merely as technicians, mechanics, nurses, etc.</p>
<p>CONTRIBUTION 3. An understanding beyond proficiency in basic language skills, of the unavoidable</p>	<p>People who <i>work with others</i> need to have effective language or communication skills to read, write, and speak in a clear, precise and effective manner. However, beyond these abilities, people must realize that human language at times contains elements of ambiguity which just as often lead to misunderstandings as they lead to enriched forms of expression. People must come to learn that, in certain settings, some</p>

<p>ambiguities, vagaries and value-laden nature of human language.</p>	<p>degree of ambiguity is inescapable or even preferred, while in others it is totally unacceptable. In addition to understanding this, students seeking to be successful in working with others must also come to an understanding that words and phrases often unavoidably carry with them value judgment and orientations, e.g., words such as “good,” “girl,” “boss,” “kid,” as well as the more familiar racial, ethnic and religious epithets and a legion of additional titles and terms.</p>
<p>CONTRIBUTION 4. The ability to recognize the limits and goals in applying analytical skills to the resolution of human problems and dilemmas.</p>	<p>Students need to develop their abilities to <i>analyze situations and problems</i> in order to respond to them and to accomplish their goals. When working with others, however, people must come to realize that there are a variety of analytical methods, some of which are more suitable than other for dealing with certain situations. There are times when the analytic skills learned, for example, through a study of literature might prove more effective than similar skills practiced by technicians, engineers, or social scientists. On other occasions it might prove valuable to realize that particularly when dealing with human beings a situation might not lend itself to any precise analysis: it may be over determined. Certain human activities, e.g. forms of amusement, painful or humorous events, etc., are not readily captured by any of the methods of the technical and scientific fields.</p>
<p>CONTRIBUTION 5. An appreciation of the variety of human purposes and values to be realized in solving problems.</p>	<p>In <i>solving problems</i> involving human beings one must have the abilities to analyze content, to understand the factors contributing to the problems, and to evaluate the likely effectiveness of alternative resolutions in keeping with the basic objective to be achieved. However, beyond possessing and using these skills, one must realize that human beings often disagree with one another on how to proceed because they have different objectives to be accomplished. Not everyone involved in a given situation may share a common purpose or hold the same values or hold them in the same order.</p>
<p>CONTRIBUTION 6. The ability to approach and make decisions concerning problems that may not have a singular resolution.</p>	<p>In mathematics, the natural sciences and in technical fields the approaches taken to answering questions and <i>solving problems</i> are well-defined and usually lead to a preferred solution. In the workplace questions arise for which there is not one definite correct answer. Too often the situation is such that some answer must be given, some decision made, some course of action taken. The study of the Humanities can offer a student methods that are orderly and structured and which can be brought to bear on difficult questions.</p>
<p>CONTRIBUTION 7. An appreciation of the importance of responding appropriately to change as an essential and necessary human activity.</p>	<p>While people who prepare for occupational fields learn facts, acquire skills, and <i>learn how to adapt to changes</i> in their fields, it is through the Humanities that they learn that these skills are absolutely essential for human beings to have, not simply as a technician or worker, but as a being struggling to survive and to prosper in a constantly changing world. The physical environment, social environment, and work environment are constantly changing and humans must learn to adapt to those changes. The Humanities convey this sense of the importance of learning how to adapt, to continue learning and to grow.</p>

<p>CONTRIBUTION 8. The ability to make judgments reflective of human values: ethical, aesthetic.</p>	<p>When delivering a service or a product there are other considerations besides whether or not it will fulfill the terms of a contract or suit the purpose or do the job. In addition to delivering what was expected, was the product or service provide made as pleasing to human sensibilities as possible? Will any one human be harmed by what is to be done? Were any deceptions or deceits practiced? These considerations are taken up not because they might serve the interests of the economic enterprise and its concern for income and profit but because they reflect the <i>values of truth, beauty and goodness</i> which human beings seek to realize.</p>
<p>CONTRIBUTION 9. An appreciation of what human beings hold in common which encourages their sense of civic purpose and responsible citizenship.</p>	<p>Nowhere else in the curriculum except through a study of the disciplines which promote an appreciation for what human beings hold in common is there given any attention to what is needed in order to motivate people to <i>work together to realize common goals</i> both in the workplace and in society. The realization that human beings do share more in common than they have differences and that only through a civilized social life in which all cooperate can those common elements be held secure and diversity respected are fostered by a study of the Humanities. It is a realization that comes through a study of the human condition past and present and through the study of the expression given by human beings to those sufferings, joys, needs and desires which all people have.</p>
<p>CONTRIBUTION 10. An appreciation of the values of diverse cultures.</p>	<p>When attempting to <i>understand others in order to work along with them</i>, it is important to realize that not everyone shares the same culture. The study of human achievements and human expressions and human values as present in cultures other than one's own fosters a sense of respect and appreciation for the ways in which human beings have found for learning how to live and to achieve together and to prosper. Through an appreciation of other cultures one often learns what is truly distinct about one's own. In the workplace where people from different cultures must learn to work together it often becomes an imperative to learn of and respect the diversity of cultures present in order to effectively communicate and resolve problems. The Humanities involve by their very nature the study of other cultures, their achievements, forms of expression, and values.</p>

Work Cited

Cox, Rodney. Shared Vision Implementation Project, 1988-1991. Final Report of FIPSE Project. Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education. 1 Dec. 1988. 29 Sept. 2007 < http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/13/0c/1a.pdf>.