

*Beyond Soft Skills:
Redefining the Role of the Liberal Arts
in a College Education*

*Georgian College, September 20-21
Abstracts and Bios*



● *Sara Alexandre, A Look at The Liberal Arts Through the Lens of Applied Linguistics*

ABSTRACT: The liberal arts have a long-rooted tradition in history dating back from Plato to Nussbaum, with no signs of slowing down and every opportunity to evolve (Maddocks, 2018). The key to historical endurance is evolution; with that comes a new era of this already diverse field. In the present age of technology, globalization and growth; the world has experienced a behemoth epidemic of immigration. The English language, once dominating the earth, has now evolved into a lingua franca. There are approximately 1.75 billion English language learners worldwide; with that number continuously rising (Beare, 2018). It has been forecasted by the British Council, that nearly two billion people will be learning or speaking English by the year 2020 (Van Tol, 2016). English has evolved into a global, and now the liberal arts must too evolve with it. Colleges have the opportunity to take the liberal arts curriculum and integrate it with second language teaching. Currently, students wishing to study in an English-speaking country must meet the appropriate language requirements. Therefore, many of the students who take college-level ESL courses are spending their time and resources to bridge the gap between language proficiency and their desired programme of study. Consequently, these students can become frustrated, unengaged and un-motivated in their ESL classes, making the language-learning process much more difficult. These students can often feel like they are wasting time, and therefore try to rush their education. What if the solution to this problem is the liberal arts? A liberal arts degree offers native-English speaking students the opportunity to receive a broader education which prepares them for the workforce when they are unsure of which academic path to choose (Rutgers 2019). In doing so, they will gain creative, critical thinking and cognitive skills that becomes invaluable in the workplace. Princeton University claims their liberal arts degree will teach their students to "read critically, write cogently and think broadly (Princeton 2019)." The liberal arts and ESL programmes both aim to improve learners' skills and provide them with cognitive discipline and critical thinking. It is only logical to com-

bine both programmes and provide non-native English speakers to gain language proficiency while studying a multitude of disciplines which will help them acquire future careers. This paper aims to explore integrating both programmes in order to provide ESL students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in their field of interest while gaining language acquisition.

BIO: Sara Alexandre holds an undergraduate degree in Social Sciences from the University of Ottawa. She attended the first cohort of the TESOL Plus programme at Sheridan College, where she was valedictorian and graduated with honours. She is currently an ESL instructor at Sheridan College and working on her master's in applied Linguistics from Mary Immaculate College.

● **Anita Arvast, *Whose Glasses are YOU Wearing?: Critical Theory = Critical Thinking***

ABSTRACT: Dr. Arvast will be discussing various “lenses” people wear which inform our perspectives on society, from both the personal to the institutional, in the form of discourses. She is a strong believer that one of the key bases for critical thinking involves a cogent understanding of interdisciplinary critical theory.

BIO: Anita Arvast has a PhD from the University of Toronto and completed her undergrad and Masters degrees at York University in English Literature. She now applies her critical theory training to cases of true crime and social injustice, and has published two books in the genre with a third on the way. She is a full-time professor in Liberal Arts at Georgian College.

● **Stella Bastone** (see Mandy Bonisteel et al, *What Do We Really Need To Be Good At?* below)

● **Tom Bateman, *In the Shadow of the Age of Progress: Implications for Education and Learning***

ABSTRACT: The idea of progress has guided and enlivened the political, moral, and social life of the West for centuries. Progress is here understood as an account of historical change. As time passes, according to the story of progress, we move from superstition to scientific knowledge, from barbarism to civilization, from fate to freedom, from being the passive objects of forces beyond our control to masters of nature, space, and time. Now, for a variety of reasons, the sun over brilliant progress is setting, and the shadow lengthens.

This paper will examine some of the thinkers who cast progress into question. It will touch a few implications of this lengthening shadow and will concentrate on what the nadir of progress means for education. The way out

of our gathering crises will not merely be by means of technical fixes. We will need to think, not merely calculate. While technical training has brought enormous good to our lives and prospects, it has posed challenges that cannot be met only by more technical solutions. At its best, technical education is complemented by an intellectual formation that prompts students and workers alike to ask of themselves, and of their societies, questions about the purposes, consequences, and prospects of the social, economic, and political orders in which they live.

BIO: Tom Bateman is Professor of Political Science at St Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where he has taught since 2003. His teaching and research interests include constitutionalism, constitutional law, the Canadian Charter of Rights, and religion and politics. He coordinates the University's Law, Politics, and Society Program and also is a member of the University's Great Books Program.

● Maggie Berg & Barbara K. Seeber, *Keynote Address*

BIO: Maggie Berg is Professor of English at Queen's University. Her teaching areas are Victorian literature, and literary theory, particularly gender, sexuality, and animal studies. She has published two books on the Brontë sisters, and is currently completing a book, *Animals and Animality in the Brontë Novels*. She is co-author of *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*. In addition to being three-time winner of the W.J. Barnes Award for Teaching Excellence, she was awarded the Chancellor A. Charles Baillie Award for Teaching Excellence in 2005, and the University Chair in Teaching and Learning in 2009.

BIO: Barbara K. Seeber is Professor of English at Brock University. Her primary areas of teaching and writing are eighteenth-century fiction and Animal Studies. She is author of two books on Austen, most recently *Jane Austen and Animals* as well as co-author of *The Slow Professor*. She has published essays on topics such as animals in Mary Wollstonecraft, the country house tradition, and film adaptations of Austen. She received the Brock University Faculty of Humanities Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2014.

● Mandy Bonisteel et al, *What Do We Really Need To Be Good At?*

ABSTRACT: For half a century, forecasters at the intersections of education and globalization have variously labelled what we need to be good at as core skills, life skills, relational skills, soft, transferable or broadband skills, generic skills, and employability skills. Listening and intercultural awareness, teamwork and critical thinking are among the most important competencies sought by employers. These skills are also central to civic engagement. The Truth and

Reconciliation Commission Call to Action includes "building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect". Joseph Aoun says that 'humanics' - technical, data and human literacy - will help us to be 'robot proof'. This panel session introduces participants to The Collaborative, a SSHRC funded network dedicated to helping educators foster a better culture around Social Science and Humanities (SSH) knowledge and skills and to the philosophy and practice of integrating Indigenous Learning Outcomes into curriculum and educational frameworks. Panel members will explore the tensions, dualities and coexistence of Indigenous learning outcomes, the use of technology to teach/practice 'human skills', and the liberal arts in the context of future work as well as preparation for meaningful and critical engagement in civil society. In this session, co-presented by faculty from McMaster University and George Brown College, we will re-imagine what human literacy brought to life in educational environments might look like.

Panel Presenters

Sandra Lapointe, Project Director for The Collaborative, McMaster University
Lori Budge, Coordinator of Indigenous Initiatives & Counselling, George Brown College

Stella Bastone, Instructional Design Professor, George Brown College

Moderator: Mandy Bonisteel, Professor, George Brown College

BIO: Sandra Lapointe is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at McMaster University since 2011. A Commonwealth alumna and a Fellow of the Humboldt Foundation, Sandra is a Research Affiliate of the Bertrand Russell Research Centre and currently Director, Associations at the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. She is Project Director of The Collaborative, a SSHRC-funded partnership dedicated to creating new resources for SSH educators and enhancing culture and public understanding of SSH skills, impact and education.

BIO: Stella Bastone is an instructional designer and professor at George Brown College in Toronto. With almost 20 years of experience in technology-enabled learning environments, she is an advocate of open educational resources and promotes the use of Creative Commons licensing in her teaching.

BIO: Lori Budge Coordinates Indigenous Initiatives & Counselling at George Brown College where she has had a profound impact on the integration and enrolment rate of Indigenous students for over 20 years and played an instrumental role in the establishment of two student centres for Indigenous students. Lori provides assistance to other Indigenous Services staff, serves on numerous external boards and committees, consults with programs on indigenous content and delivery methodologies, and teaches the Indigenous Studies course in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

BIO: Mandy Bonisteel is a professor at George Brown College. She is also a Community Research Associate with the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children (CREVAWC). She has co-created numerous workplace training programs for organizations and community groups, in Canada and abroad. Mandy has received the Ontario Premier's Award and the Ontario Medal of Citizenship.

● **Lori Budge** (see Mandy Bonisteel et al, *What Do We Really Need To Be Good At?* above)

● **Liane Cheshire & Nancy Noldy-MacLean, *Reflections on Interdisciplinary Collaboration in the College System: The Benefits of Integrating Liberal Arts and Degree Program Scholarship***

ABSTRACT: Over the last two decades, the Ontario colleges have increased the emphasis on the liberal arts through the delivery of applied bachelor degrees. This shift has facilitated the creation of Liberal Arts Departments within many colleges; faculty in these departments are experts in their fields, actively engaging in academic scholarship in their respective disciplines. Unlike the faculty who belong to departments that deliver core program curriculum and participate in applied research activities, the faculty in Liberal Arts Departments usually deliver discipline-specific breadth courses to all college degree programs and typically engage in the scholarship of discovery, or basic research. Drawing upon our experiences of interdisciplinary collaboration, we outline the benefits of integrating liberal arts and degree program scholarship and frame these endeavours as strategic partnerships that will strengthen the role of the liberal arts in Ontario colleges.

BIO: Liane Cheshire is a professor in the Liberal Arts department teaching courses in gender and women's studies, sexuality and psychology. Liane came to Georgian College in 1997 and has worked in several roles during her time at the college. Over the years, Liane has worked in student services as a counsellor, in the Laurentian partnership program as a coordinator and professor and is now in the Liberal Arts department. Liane holds a Master's Degree in School Counselling from Niagara University and is near the completion of her Ph.D. in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies at York University. Liane is a Certified Canadian Counsellor with the Canadian Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy. Liane's research interests include intersectionality theory and counselling psychology, sexuality and identities.

BIO: Dr. Nancy Noldy-MacLean is an Academic Quality Lead for degrees at Georgian College. She received her Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Ottawa where she studied brain processes underlying attention and memory. She was subsequently a Research Scientist in the neurology program at the Addiction Research Foundation and then at the Playfair Neuroscience Unit of the Toronto Hospital. Nancy has done numerous invited lectures and has presented research papers or posters at more than 20 international conferences in Japan, Finland, Spain, Hungary and various locations in the USA. She has over 30 publications in psychological journals. Nancy came to Georgian full-time as a faculty member in 2002, teaching courses in psychology. She is also a registered clinical psychologist, practicing in the area of child and adolescent neuropsychology.

● Elena Chudaeva, *Innovative Learning Environments and Blended Learning Designs: Ways to Enhance Liberal Arts Courses*

ABSTRACT: Liberal Arts play a vital role in preparing students to tackle our society's most pressing problems (Future of Liberal Arts Report, 2016). How can Liberal Arts courses meet the evolving 21st century needs of students and society? How can they help students navigate a rapidly changing world? Advancing cultures of innovation could be an answer. Horizon Report (2015-2019) has been indicating advancing cultures of innovations as a key trend for several years. The primary focus of educational innovations should be on teaching and learning theory and practice, as well as on the learner, parents, community, society, and its culture (Serdyukov, 2017).

But what is innovation? The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ran an Innovative Learning Environment Project since mid-2000s. As a result, OECD (2017) suggests "7+3" framework, including seven principles of learning and three areas of innovation in education. We will have a look at this framework as an opportunity and practical guidance for developing Innovative Learning Environments.

In the past decade education paradigm was shifting to include online and hybrid learning (Horizon Report 2013 - 2019). In 2019, blended learning (BL) designs reappeared again. BL is a "thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Students report a preference for blended learning, citing flexibility, ease of access, and the integration of sophisticated multimedia (Horizon Report 2019). We will discuss BL designs for higher education, including Community of Inquiry framework (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018), TPACK framework, and four levels of blending (Bonk & Graham).

The digital revolution poses both an imperative and an opportunity for the liberal arts (Future of Liberal Arts Report, 2016). Horizon Report 2019 states that improving digital fluency and rethinking practice of teaching are

among the challenges to be solved. BL designs provide plenty of opportunities to create innovative practices and incorporate technology.

Blended Learning is here to stay. So are Liberal Arts. Let's innovate!

BIO: Elena Chudaeva's areas of expertise are physics, statistics, and mathematics. As a faculty member at George Brown College, Toronto, ON, she has been teaching technology enhanced face-to-face courses and has developed an online activity-based statistics course and a blended physics course. Elena is interested in online and blended learning in higher education, and she is currently doing research on effective models of blended learning for college elective courses (George Brown College Research Grant 2019).

● Howard Doughty - Guest Panelist, *What Role can the Liberal Arts Play in a College Education?* (Plenary Panel)

BIO: Howard Doughty has taught at Seneca College for over 50 years and has been an official of Local 560 of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union for almost as long. A long-time academic journal editor and author of over 600 books, journal articles, book reviews and review essays, he has been a critical educator and critic of higher education in North America as well as a theorist and practitioner of democracy since the 1960s.

● Gary Evans, *Visual Arts as a Gateway Drug*

ABSTRACT: "Visual Arts as a Gateway Drug" will look at how the visual arts models so much original behavior it should be included as a tool for understanding in more of our teaching and learning. Its ability to make concrete critical thinking skills, to remind us of our shared human experience and importantly present us with models of the creative process, is remarkable and engrossing. Visual Arts and Culture are the original Memes. Novelty, humor, history, advocacy, social commentary are all drivers of the creative process. Coupled with a remarkable alchemical quality that can transfer the mundane into the magical, it can and should be inspiring.

BIO: Gary Evans was born in Weston Super Mare, England and resides in Alliston, Ontario. He has been exhibiting work professionally since 1995. Evans' work in contemporary painting challenges traditional notions of perception and experience of the Canadian landscape. Of his more than 20 solo exhibitions highlights include a touring exhibition of his work, *Seeing Things: The Paintings of Gary Evans*, curated by Stuart Reid, which toured across Canada between 2000-2002 as well as several survey exhibitions of paintings, *Station*, at The Art Gallery Of Windsor in 2008 and *Farther Afield* at the MacLaren Art Centre, 2016. Evans is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design and is an in-

structor at the School of Design And Visual Art, Georgian College, Barrie, Ontario.

● **MaryAnne John, *Liberal Arts Education: Critiquing our Social, Cultural and Political Realities***

ABSTRACT: Our multicultural realities and preparing students to meet the pressures of the workplace place the liberal arts classroom in a strategic place. Our classrooms must be venues where academic conventions are critically discussed, analyzed and criticized. I advocate following the New Literacies tradition (New London Group, 1994) which endorses that learners come into the classroom with multifarious literacy practices. How liberal arts teachers, accept these learners and help create innovative spaces both inside and outside the classroom is crucial. In Toronto, learners come into the liberal arts classrooms with their lived experiences; the academic literacies teacher uses these sociocultural practices innovatively, as resources in the classroom, validating the knowledge and experience of the learners. The crucial difference in the plural form “literacies” (Williams & Allen, 2014) is that learners have a voice, an identity, and an ability to critique literary conventions. Helping students develop their voice by discussing key sociocultural and sociopolitical issues becomes imperative for us in the liberal arts classroom. How learners make sense of their sociocultural backgrounds and lived experiences all impact their learning and therefore their interactions in the liberal arts classroom. Academic literacies necessitates appreciating and accepting these literacies as being valid (Scott, Bloommaert, Street, & Turner, 2007). When liberal arts teachers notice and accept the academic literacies of learners, it helps learners to become knowledge generators and not merely knowledge consumers (Lea, 2016). When liberal arts teachers use the academic literacies approach, they facilitate the teaching-learning process by inclusivity, and constantly innovating their practices to create a sustainable, respectful, and pro-active liberal arts classroom. Thus, by creating spaces where students critique their social, economic and political realities and exchange various perspectives, we in the liberal arts classrooms will achieve a balance between what the world demands and what the graduates should inherently value.

BIO: MaryAnne John is passionate about teaching English to multicultural learners. She is currently teaching in Sheridan College, Seneca College and University of Toronto. Previously taught in the UAE at the American University of Sharjah. Have completed CELTA, B.A (Eng. Hons), M.A in English, M.A in TESOL and currently pursuing my PhD in Composition and TESOL.

● Hang-Sun Kim, *Bildung, Ausbildung and the Modern Entrepreneur*

BIO: Hang-Sun Kim is Language Coordinator and Assistant Professor of German, Teaching Stream, at the University of Toronto. Hang-Sun received her MA in Germanic Languages and Literatures from the University of Toronto and completed her doctoral work at Harvard in 2012. Her dissertation examines Hugo von Hofmannsthal's literary representation of the crisis of authorship at the turn of the 20th century. Focusing on Hofmannsthal's fictional letters and poetological reflections, it explores the slippery relationship between the author and the medium of his art, the origin of the symbol, and the status of literature in an age of ever-growing media competition. Hang-Sun's current research interests include foreign language pedagogy, turn-of-the-century Vienna, philosophy of language, philosophy of aesthetics, and contemporary translingual literature by transcultural German-language authors. Before joining the German Department at the University of Toronto, she taught at Harvard and the Goethe-Institut Toronto.

● Jordy Koffman et al, *Developing a Philosophy of Education Community of Practice*

ABSTRACT: A philosophy of education examines metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, social and political theory, and aesthetics in all aspects of higher education. In 2012, a group of Liberal Arts and Sciences professors at Ontario's George Brown College began to meet, share readings and explore perspectives. Interest began to grow. These seminars led to an annual Philosophy of Education Conference, a scholarly forum intended to keep questioning alive, appealing to a wide range of people engaged in reflection and discourse on a breadth of educational issues -- encountered in classrooms, administration, and research - through a liberal arts lens. Then the challenge really began! The liberal arts have an important role to play in modern college education, but is modern education ready for the liberal arts? Nurturing meaningful engagement for college practitioners and theorists presents numerous barriers. It requires working across program silos, creating access for the precariously employed, presenting opportunities to join the discussion at various points, working across the divide between theory and practice, and developing an iterative process to shape ongoing seminars and events. Can these barriers be offset by the contribution general education offers? "General Education through the Ontario college system contributes to the development of citizens who are conscious of the diversity, complexity, and richness of the human experience; who are able to establish meaning through this consciousness; and, who, as a result, are able to contribute thoughtfully, creatively, and positively to the society in which they live and work" (Ontario Colleges Liberal Arts and Science Council). This panel explores the developmental journey in a college to a Philosophy of Education *Community of Practice* (Wenger 1998) using ongoing sem-

inars and events, think tank collaboration, and an online forum used to curate materials for an ever-increasing membership. The goal is to share and deepen philosophical approaches to truth, knowledge construction, technology, and current and future directions in post-secondary education.

Panelists

BIO: Heather Lash has been a faculty member at George Brown for 9 years, mainly with Academic Upgrading in the School of Work & College Preparation (CPLS), and is currently delivering Communications courses to an all-Indigenous cohort, looking deeply at what it means to “Indigenize” curriculum. She has been involved in adult and transitional education for most of her adult life. She holds a Master of Environmental Studies, where the “environment” under study was the classroom. Her studies in Narrative Ethics focused on the philosophical and political dimensions of receiving people’s stories of harm they’ve experienced. She’s continued in that area ever since, researching and writing on the long-term impacts of violence and trauma on our capacities to learn, and on creating spaces that support both faculty and students to engage in teaching and learning at their most transformational. Much of her work is housed at www.violenceandlearning.net

BIO: Jordy Koffman is a Professor in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences at George Brown College, with over ten years teaching experience. He has also held the position of Chair of the Philosophy of Education Committee at George Brown since 2017, and spear-headed a shift in its focus in order to foster more college-wide and province-wide collaboration. With a sustained multi-disciplinary drive, he has taught a wide variety of courses and subjects, including philosophy, medieval literature, evolutionary theory, anthropology, archaeology, psychology, history and linguistics. He holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Queen’s University, where he investigated the philosophy of history in Plato and 17th-century Platonism.

BIO: Dan Kozlovic is a Professor in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences at George Brown College. He teaches life sciences and environmental sciences.

BIO: Colleen Mahy is a Professor in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences at George Brown College. She teaches world religion and literature.

● **Borys Kowalsky, *When do you see Red? Liberal Arts Education and Moral Indignation***

ABSTRACT: The main objective of this paper is to shed light on the nature of moral indignation and the various ways in which it blocks critical thinking - precisely the kind of thinking that is crucial to the successful functioning of a liberal democracy. The paper also raises the question of how liberal arts edu-

cation can contribute to the curbing of moral indignation and its pernicious influence on political discourse.

BIO: Borys Kowalsky (Ph.D., Political Science, University of Toronto) is currently teaching liberal arts courses at Georgian College (Barrie, ON). He has written on subjects as diverse as Martin Heidegger and the crisis in Ukraine, and has delivered presentations and scholarly papers on a variety of topics in philosophy, education, politics, and the arts. Borys' chief intellectual interests are the history and philosophy of art and music, and the human meaning of modern science. He is completing a monograph on John Stuart Mill on science and the religion of the future. His most recent paper, "Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and the Debate between Ancients and Moderns," was delivered at the Association of Core Texts and Courses (ACTC) Conference, Santa Fe, NM, April, 2019.

- **Dan Kozlovic** (see Jordy Koffman et al, *Developing a Philosophy of Education Community of Practice* above)
- **Ed Ksenych**, *Plato's Cave and Liberal Education: Re-framing Being in the World*

ABSTRACT: The theme of the conference is *Beyond Soft Skills: Re-Defining the Role of the Liberal Arts in a College Education*. But when we engage in activities like defining and re-defining, and take some of our bearings from the etymological roots of key terms we're using, we encounter odd things. Education's Latin roots suggest 'leading-out' (*educere*). Yet most current educational practice and discussion focus on what we should be doing to 'lead into' (*inducere*), evidenced in the preoccupation with measurable, applicable outcomes, and, in the case of general education, soft skills, for the purpose of taking one's place in the world of work.

Education, in Plato's storied *Republic*, involved a leading out of the mythic cave he contended we collectively dwell within: from the apparent world of 'becoming' to an encounter with the realm of 'being', complicated by a return to the world of becoming. Moreover, Plato instituted that the site for such education would be a school, the Academy. Again we encounter something odd. The Greek word *skole* means leisure. Yet our present day schools are centred around work and subject to an intensified, rationalized teaching-learning process.

This paper proposes that revisiting Plato's cave offers guidance in contending with the transformations that Ontario's colleges, higher education, and our graduates are, and will be, confronting. The presentation provides examples that incorporate lessons from re-visiting the cave in liberal arts and science courses, often out of season with the trends occurring in contemporary

education, but very much in season with the needs and critical interests of students.

BIO: Ed Ksenych did his graduate work in social theory at York University and has been a professor at George Brown College for over 35 years. He has taught various courses in sociology and philosophy, and edited books of readings for introductory sociology and deviance courses.

- **Sandra Lapointe** (see Mandy Bonisteel et al, *What Do We Really Need To Be Good At?* above)
- **Heather Lash** (see Jordy Koffman et al, *Developing a Philosophy of Education Community of Practice* above)
- **Colleen Mahy** (see Jordy Koffman et al, *Developing a Philosophy of Education Community of Practice* above)
- **Patrick Malcolmson, *Political Science: A Liberal Art?***

ABSTRACT: In North American universities and colleges, political science is normally taught as one of the disciplines within the faculty of arts. There is a somewhat vague idea that the disciplines constituting the faculty of arts are the liberal arts. It is further assumed that taking arts courses provides one with a liberal education. This general perspective is worth analyzing. I propose to do that by considering the following questions: Is political science one of the liberal arts? If so, how precisely does political science fit the purpose of a liberal art? What remains of the distinction between a science and an art if political science is a liberal art?

BIO: Patrick Malcolmson is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Political Science at St. Thomas University. He has a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Toronto and is co-author of *The Canadian Regime* and *Liberal Education and Value Relativism*. He also served as the Vice-President (Academic) at St. Thomas University, on the Canadian Electoral Boundaries Commission, and as Chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission. He has written widely in the areas of political thought, literature and politics, and liberal education.

● **Rick Myers - Guest Panelist, *What Role can the Liberal Arts Play in a College Education?* (Plenary Panel)**

BIO: Rick Myers holds a PhD in political science from the University of Toronto. He was a professor at St. Thomas University in Fredericton for 25 years. For seven of those years, he served as that university's Vice-President (Academic). Rick then did a five-year term as President of Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie and is now in his fourth year as Principal of St. Paul's University College at the University of Waterloo. Other relevant experience includes two years as the Chair of the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission and six years as a member of the Council of Scholars for the American Academy of Liberal Education, an accrediting body based in Washington DC. Rick is co-author of a popular Canadian government textbook, co-author of a short book call *Liberal Education and Value Relativism*, and is about to release a book titled *Thinking About Happiness*. His next project is a book titled *Boot Camp for Your B.A.: An Introduction to the Fundamental Skills of Liberal Learning*.

● **Nancy Noldy-MacLean (see Liane Cheshire & Nancy Noldy-MacLean, *Reflections on Interdisciplinary Collaboration in the College System: Experiences Integrating Liberal Arts and Degree Program Scholarship* above)**

● **Thomas Ponniah - Guest Panelist, *What Role can the Liberal Arts Play in a College Education?* (Plenary Panel)**

BIO: Thomas Ponniah is an Affiliate of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University” and a Professor and Coordinator of the Global Great Books Certificate program in the School of Liberal Arts and Science at George Brown College. He is the co-editor of “The Revolution in Venezuela” (Harvard University Press 2011), the co-editor of “Another World is Possible” (2003 Zed Books), and one of the co-authors of “Unholy Trinity” (2003). He was a Lecturer on Social Studies at Harvard from 2003-2011.

● **Lloyd Robertson, *Does Liberal Education Require a Utopia, and is this Good?***

ABSTRACT: Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is to a great extent a presentation of a self-taught student's journey not to different geographic continents, but to various and conflicting books. It is a book about, and potentially an example of, liberal education. Gulliver sees the people of his own time from a distance—in fact from a height, from a superior perspective; then he sees something like the opposite, people who are bigger than himself and his fellow citizens in more ways than one; then he is back with modern Europe, this time focusing on

science and technology, in both cases on what might be called the inhumanity of their practitioners, even when they mean well. Finally, in what one might expect would be the true utopia, the more or less perfect regime, we find Gulliver living with rational horses.

In every regime to which he is exposed, Gulliver engages in arguments as to what is better and worse for a human being. In the fourth voyage, as a student he seems pathetically pleasing to at least one of his teachers—he wants only to imitate them as much as possible. He takes this so literally, it is clear that after all his learning he fails in self-knowledge, which one might think is the main goal of a liberal education. It seems even more impossible for Gulliver to become a rational horse than for a human society to resemble the regime of the rational horses. Is the study of a utopia, very different from any society one is likely to live in, essential to a liberal education? Does such a study have a tendency to seal us off from our fellow citizens, so that we hardly even speak the same language? Is such a study likely to be useless both to ourselves and others? I will consider these questions while making a brief comparison between *Gulliver's Travels* and Plato's *Republic*—a work that Swift appears to have in mind, in which liberal education holds out some promise of being more successful than it is for Gulliver.

BIO: Lloyd W. Robertson holds a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto. He has taught at the post-secondary level at selective liberal arts colleges in the U.S., and at a number of Canadian universities. He writes on issues in Canadian and U.S. politics and history.

● **Barbara K. Seeber** (see Maggie Berg & Barbara K. Seeber, *Keynote Address* above)

● **Scott Staring, *College Education in the Twilight of Liberalism***

ABSTRACT: In this talk I reflect on what many have described as a crisis of legitimacy in the liberal arts today. The overarching claim that I make is that this crisis can be traced to the fact that our modern liberal understanding of freedom is in tension with a serious engagement with the liberal arts. Despite this tension, the liberal arts have survived up to our day and have in fact played an important role in moderating the liberal model of freedom. In recent decades, however, we have seen the consolidation of a much more doctrinaire and absolute version of liberalism in countries around the world. One of the ironies of this “neoliberal” era is that it has become that much more difficult to make a compelling justification for the liberal arts, even as the need for their moderating influence grows.

BIO: Scott Staring is a professor with Georgian College's Department of Liberal Arts. He holds a doctorate in political science from the University of Toronto,

along with degrees in history, philosophy, and communications. He has published articles in the fields of Canadian political thought and Canadian foreign policy and is currently working on a book manuscript for UBC Press on the thinker George Grant. He is a two-time recipient of Harvard's Derek Bok Centre Certificate of Teaching Excellence.

● **Alanda Theriault - Guest Panelist, *What Role can the Liberal Arts Play in a College Education?* (Plenary Panel)**

BIO: Alanda Theriault is a graduate of the Masters of Arts program in Philosophy at McMaster University where she specialized in ethics, feminist philosophy, and the history of idea. Currently, Alanda works as an instructor at Georgian College Barrie in the Liberal Arts where she teaches courses that encourage students to think critically and compassionately, as well as to be curious about the world of ideas that surround them. She regularly teaches on the philosophies of economics, feminism, critical thinking, and special topics courses on the history of ideas pertaining to the concept of evil, the ethics of food, and the philosophies of human intimacy.

Her scholarly activities include publications, public lectures, ethics commentary on local broadcasts, and an active editorial schedule. She is a recipient of a Teaching Excellence Award at Georgian College for her innovative use of technology in online liberal arts learning. Alanda also actively uses her training in ethics in her volunteer position as a community representative on the Bioethics Committee at the Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre. In her spare time she enjoys becoming less terrible at ballet, watching movies, reading biographies, traveling, and enjoying a good laugh with her husband and dog.

● **Daniel Travers, *Is a Liberal Arts Education the Antidote to Rising Global Intolerance?***

ABSTRACT: Few political scientists deny that populism is on the rise, but is liberalism - as Vladimir Putin stated in June 2019 - obsolete? The post-war consensus which enabled liberal democracy to thrive in the second half of the twentieth century is under threat, but can liberal arts professors and graduates play a pivotal role against rising extremism?

There is a clear link between a rise in populism and a lack of critical thought. Haig Bosmajian probed the connection between populism, crowd mentality, and lack of critical thinking in his study of Nazi persuasion before and during the Second World War (Bosmajian: 1966). As young people in the West turn away from the humanities as a vocation in favour of programs which are based solely on post-graduation employability and earning potential, is it likely that this phenomenon will continue?

This paper will examine the role professors and graduates from a liberal arts program can play within constructing (or perhaps re-constructing) popular consensus around tolerance, human rights, and liberalism. It will draw on the work of Karl Popper's *The Open Society* and theories on the necessity to be intolerant of intolerance (Popper: 1945), and the dilemma of relationship establishment within groups (Aguilar and Parravano: 2013). Finally, it will pose the questions: can a liberal arts education provide a necessary antidote to rising extremism and secondly; what can liberal arts professors do to create active and engaged citizens in their classrooms?

BIO: Dr. Daniel Travers is Professor of Liberal Arts at Georgian College's Barrie Campus. With a PhD from the University of Huddersfield, UK, he is the author of two books and seven articles/chapters in edited collections on conflict and identity. He resides in Port McNicoll with his wife and two children.

● **Jacqui Woods-Powell, *Forget the Photo Opportunities: Liberal Arts Offer More Than a Snapshot of Soft Skills in the College Sector***

ABSTRACT: College Liberal Arts subjects, COMM and GNED, are not seen as the 'sexy' option by students; there are few photo opportunities and often times we hear value statements such as "I want to focus on my core subjects" or "This course doesn't matter." The irony here is that negative statements levelled at courses of humanistic study - from across the academic spectrum - frequently ignore employer and industry surveys that place soft skills top of the Essential Employability Skills charts (and lead to careers in multiple fields).

BIO: Jacqui Woods-Powell is Coordinator for Communication courses at Georgian College's Barrie campus. Formerly a college lecturer in the UK where she taught students with mild-moderate learning disabilities, Jacqui completed her MEd at the University of Manchester where her interests in discourse analysis led to a research study on language and learning in the college classrooms. Jacqui is a coordinator and founding member of the Barrie Twig - a localized branch of Editors Canada, and is currently Vice President of the Midland Ski Club. She lives in Penetanguishene, Ontario.

● **Jordan Youd, *Liberal Arts Saves Culture Through Skepticism***

ABSTRACT: Our current internet and social media dominated culture holds, at its core, the chief values of expediency and group identification. In and of themselves, these are not inherently bad cultural practices. Rather, it is the manner in which these cultural practices have come to exist in an ideological vacuum that has become problematic. These cultural ideas and practices were never meant to stand alone, because on their own they are woefully incomplete and utterly lacking in greater cultural context.

This is where a Liberal Arts education can save the day. A Liberal Arts education has, at its core, values that stand in complete juxtaposition to those that are currently being pushed by our culture. The chief of these values is a critical and thoughtful engagement with everything. Other core values of the Liberal Arts such as questioning, engaging with, examining, and thinking for oneself demand that a person not simply absorb culture, but rather take an active and productive role in culture. It is values such as these of which our culture finds itself needing more.

Where the rest of the world is shifting toward acceptance, obedience, and the all powerful “Like”, a Liberal Arts based education is fast becoming one of the last places where people are encouraged to be discerning and to pause critically before simply absorbing culture. Indeed, the Liberal Arts are one of the last places culturally where people are encouraged to hold the bright light of skepticism up to their world and become capable of meeting it on their own terms.

With these ideas in mind the inherent value of a Liberal Arts education is not simply its humanizing effect as has traditionally been argued, but rather the fact that a Liberal Arts education is purpose built to facilitate people developing the very human quality of critical thought and engagement. Qualities which, elsewhere in academia and culture, has been ignored to the point of near complete cultural atrophy.

BIO: Jordan Youd is a professor with Georgian College’s Department of Liberal Arts.