




The Importance of the Discussion Method in the Undergraduate Business Classroom

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Abstract

The Discussion Method produces significant student learning outcomes. In a time where we are only beginning to witness artificial intelligence's disruption of work and the economy, these learning outcomes are crucial to personal and professional success. This paper begins by tracing the role of the Discussion Method within the liberal arts tradition, and by extension the Confucian tradition. Second, this paper examines how the Discussion Method lost its value in higher education as a consequence of the employability problem. In this section, the employability problem is defined as a two-fold misunderstanding among students and parents regarding the purpose of education and how to prepare for the workplace. Third, this paper reframes the purpose of the Discussion Method in an integrated curriculum for preparing students to achieve personal and professional success. Also, in the third section, student generated data serve as evidence to support the argument that (1) discussion-based classes are an important missing element in undergraduate management education and (2) discussion-based classes are superior to large lectures. This paper concludes that a discussion-based business pedagogy anchored by the liberal arts and sciences leads to eight major learning outcomes: (1) how to reconcile opposing arguments; (2) how to think on one's own two feet; (3) how to formulate cohesive arguments to reach a consensus; (4) how to mitigate fear of sharing individual opinions by building relationship among classmates; (5) how to allow students to learn better by motivating them to prepare more for class; (6) how to enable students to remain engaged during and after class; (7) how to embraces nuance; and (8) how to integrate new ideas from disparate perspectives and disciplines.

Keywords Discussion-based learning · Liberal arts · Business education · Integrated learning

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Introduction

The Discussion Method produces important student learning outcomes. By teaching students broadly through the Discussion Method in the context of an integrated business, liberal arts, and sciences curriculum, students naturally learn to view and understand the world as it is. In this way and absent the artificial division between academic disciplines, students learn how to make connections on their own between seemingly disparate ideas and phenomena. This is an important skill for all students to acquire because real-life problems are transdisciplinary in nature and do not come with labels. In a time where we are only beginning to witness artificial intelligence's disruption of work, these foundational skills are crucial for a lifetime of personal and professional success. The Socratic method of questioning is the Discussion Method, which is at the heart of an integrated business, liberal arts, and sciences curriculum. This paper begins by tracing the role of the Discussion Method within the liberal arts tradition, and by extension the Confucian tradition. Second, this paper examines how the Discussion Method lost its value in higher education as a consequence of the employability problem. In this section, the employability problem is defined as a two-fold misunderstanding among students and parents regarding the purpose of education and how to prepare for the workplace. Third, this paper reframes the purpose of the Discussion Method in an integrated curriculum to help students achieve personal and professional success. Also in the third section, student generated data serve as evidence to support the argument that (1) discussion-based classes are an important missing element in undergraduate management education and (2) discussion-based classes are superior to large lectures. This paper concludes that a discussion-based business pedagogy anchored by the liberal arts and sciences leads to the following eight major learning outcomes: (1) how to reconcile opposing arguments; (2) how to think on one's own two feet; (3) how to formulate cohesive arguments to reach a consensus; (4) how to mitigate fear of sharing individual opinions by building relationship among classmates; (5) how to allow students to learn better by motivating them to prepare more for class; (6) how to enable students to remain engaged during and after class; (7) how to embrace nuance; and (8) how to integrate new ideas from disparate perspectives and disciplines. Put differently, discussion-based business pedagogy prepares students to succeed in the workplace and in life.

Part I

The Discussion Method: The Heart of Liberal Arts

Historically speaking, liberal education consisted of the *trivium* of “grammar, rhetoric, and logic” and the *quadrivium* of mathematical or “learnable” arts, dimensionless arithmetic and geometry, astronomy, and music (Brann 1979 pp.118–119). With a discussion-based approach to the great books of the Western World serving as a solid backbone to their curriculum, St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California, and Northfield, Massachusetts, are probably the only two American colleges where students are not given the flexibility to choose their majors. In place of majors, these two colleges embody the original meaning of the liberal arts by offering an all-mandatory curriculum based on the great books of Western civilization. A great books curriculum benefits business students because the intellectual resources embedded in “classical texts serve as scaffolding and context within which students can better learn to think for

themselves” (Colby et al. 2011 p. 58). These scaffoldings are highly valuable because their presence confirms and legitimates students’ observations, analyses, conclusions, and convictions (Colby et al. 2011 p. 58). Drawing from my own experience as a first-generation college student as well as recent conversations with my own students at Purdue University, I have learned that in the absence of such scaffoldings, students too often presume that their own observations, analyses, and conclusions are almost not worth sharing because they have not heard their ideas articulated by anyone else in class. As a result, these students stay quiet in class. This is especially true for students who are either new to discussion-based classes or lack confidence in their own observations.

It is easy to criticize the great books curriculum as a list full of dead white men. Although this criticism is true, it misses the intent of the curriculum. When combined with the Discussion Method, the classical texts serve as scaffolding for inchoate thoughts. When used by itself in a conventional undergraduate business course, the Discussion Method functions as a scaffold to help students enter into and become part of a discussion. On the one hand, SJC is fully aware its graduates will not be able to retain the contents of all the Great Books throughout a lifetime. On the other hand, SJC is equally cognizant that graduates have the ability to apply the Discussion Method in their professional and private lives. In other words, the classical texts function as a vehicle for teaching the Discussion Method. Now, I realize that similar to SJC’s critics, my dismay at the Eurocentric reading list missed the point. On the surface, the reading list is Eurocentric. But if a student worked hard and persisted in her search, the universal lessons that are shared by all of humanity are waiting to be excavated from within every text. Put another way, it is easy to be distracted by the gap created by each author’s culture, time, gender, race, and ethnicity. Homer’s *Odysseus*, for instance, is a work of ancient Greece. At first glance, a student finds herself separated from it by thousands of years. But, if she is willing to work hard and place her faith in the Discussion Method, she will eventually see the larger themes of fate, loyalty, longing for home, and vengeance to be shared by all of humanity regardless of culture, time, socioeconomic status, gender, race, and ethnicity. But to get to the larger themes, she has to remind herself to take several steps back to look at the big picture, which is yet another skill that has tremendous value in her personal and professional life. Drawing from my work in industry, I learned that one crucial skill that differentiates managers from individual contributors is the former’s ability to see simultaneously the big and small pictures.

Commenting on a New York University Stern School of Business course design that draws on the classical texts of several global traditions, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching maintains that “having access to the past enriches and gives depth and perspective to present circumstances” (Colby et al. 2011 p. 58). In other words, a great books curriculum informs students that their questions and ideas are valuable, timely, and timeless because these questions and ideas have long been elements of our intellectual tradition. Instead of choosing to major in an academic discipline that draws on a student’s strengths, every student completes the same great books curriculum that forces them to build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses. Instead of lectures, students learn from each other in discussions that focus on the great books.

There are no lectures, no didactic discourses, no simple regurgitation of others’ conclusions. Instead, ideas are proposed, rebutted, and defended, until, through discussion and

critical argumentation, the class discerns the meaning of a given text and, more important, its veracity or error. The truth is found by way of the conversation. (Thomas Aquinas College – The Discussion Method).

Instead of sitting passively in large lectures listening to secondhand information organized by textbook authors and presented by instructors, the Discussion Method, or what Mortimer Adler (1983) calls the Socratic method of questioning, offers no place to hide, no need to technology-enhanced classrooms, and no distractions from smartphones and notebook computers. This is not to say classroom technology is inherently negative. In fact, in both the residential and online courses that I teach, which includes Organizational Behavior, Compensation, and Managing Human Capital Globally, my course websites are extremely robust in their use of newspaper articles, alumni fireside chats, research websites, business podcasts and videos to bring textbook concepts to life. Rather, those of us who teach in the modern era know that there are students who shop online and watch movies when they should be participating in discussions or taking notes. What is important is that the Discussion Method does not require a large investment in the latest classroom technology. Key to Discussion Method's success is a university's support of small classes to optimize student learning outcomes, not to mention a carefully selected text, a rectangular wooden table, chairs for approximately 22 students, and one faculty members. Drawing from my own teaching experience since 2004, the more intimate nature of discussion-based classroom creates a more engaging environment for students.

The Discussion Method produces student learning outcomes including (1) how to reconcile opposing arguments; (2) how to think on one's own two feet; (3) how to formulate cohesive arguments to reach a consensus; (4) how to mitigate fear of sharing individual opinions by building relationship among classmates; (5) how to allow students to learn better by motivating them to prepare more for class; (6) how to enable students to remain engaged during and after class; (7) how to embraces nuance; and (8) how to integrate new ideas from disparate perspectives and disciplines. Through an integrated curriculum, students learn to make connections between every idea and every phenomenon as a way to minimize the distortion provided by the artificial division between academic disciplines.

With the great books curriculum and the Discussion Method at Thomas Aquinas College and St. John's College as our reference frame, we can examine the curricula at other colleges with fresh eyes. Although there are several colleges and universities with a two-year core curriculum based on the great books, and many colleges and universities with general education programs designed to focus on "enduring questions" as well as to "connect the subjects you study to the people you will become and the world beyond the classroom" (Harvard College – Program in General Education), probably none of them achieve these similar goals by marrying the great books curriculum with the Discussion Method. In light of the fact that business is the most popular undergraduate major in America, with 381,353 degrees granted in 2016–17 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2020), this is a significant missed opportunity to use the Discussion Method to induce the eight major learning outcomes that are crucial to personal and professional success.

An integrated curriculum that has as its hallmark a thoughtfully curated curriculum that eliminates opportunities for students to creatively fulfill a series of distribution requirements can do much to help students see the transdisciplinary nature of workplace problems. A crucial element of this integrated education is the trans-disciplinary nature of each course. In other words, the required readings and discussion topics in each class draw from multiple academic

fields. Put simply, a sociology or supply chain management course should not limit itself to only works in sociology or supply chain management. Instead, such a course should draw from any field of study that has produced relevant works that examine the issues at hand. When instructors abandon disciplinary loyalty and demonstrate to students how their own transdisciplinary fluency contributes significantly to the high quality of their solutions to workplace problems, students will be convinced to imitate their instructors. Through constant analysis and discussion of works from multiple disciplines, students learn to see business problems as they exist in reality – transdisciplinary entities that can only be solved by transdisciplinary solutions. But who can identify business problems in their full glory as transdisciplinary entities with transdisciplinary root causes and respond with transdisciplinary solutions? Individuals who have developed a nuanced, transdisciplinary understanding of the world in general and of the business world in particular and “can see patterns, connections, and relationships among different aspects of the problems confronting their companies” (Colby et al. 2011 p. 31). It is not higher raw intelligence that differentiates these individuals from their peers. Rather, it is their immersion in the Discussion Method applied in a curriculum that integrates business, liberal arts, and sciences that developed their ability to identify and solve transdisciplinary business problem. It is also the same Discussion Method applied in a curriculum that integrates business, liberal arts, and sciences that develop their ability to detect patterns, connections, and relationships among seemingly disparate ideas and phenomena.

The Discussion Method: The Confucian Tradition

A great books of the Western World curriculum has its faults. For one, it is a bit narrow in that it is rooted in the European tradition. By ignoring other human intellectual traditions, it can be interpreted to imply that non-European intellectual traditions are unworthy and underdeveloped. This belief is obsolete and has no place in our time. Does the focus on the Western intellectual tradition imply that other intellectual traditions do not employ the Discussion Method? The Chinese philosophical tradition offers one alternative perspective. The *Lun-yu* or “Conversations” recorded the pithy sayings of Confucius in everyday situations. What Socrates and Confucius have in common is that both of their dialogues and aphorisms reflect the structures of their respective languages (Holzman 1956). The *Lun-yu* was recorded and organized by Confucius’ students and their students (Chan 1963 pp. 18–19). For a glimpse of this conversation, let us read what the Master said about education and learning: “Is it not a pleasure to learn and to repeat or practice from time to time what has been learned? Is it not delightful to have friends coming from afar? Is one not a superior man if he does not feel hurt even though he is not recognized?” (Confucius 1963: *The Analects* 1:1). Here, Confucius underlines both the joy of learning and how practice leads to mastery of newly learned skills. This mastery, in turn, creates a virtuous circle and makes learning even more enjoyable. This joy, the Sage believes, is similar if not equal to the pleasure we experience when seeing friends from distant places. The Master also comments on his own life experience traveling in search of a head of state who values his advice. When read together in a broad and balanced liberal arts curriculum, ancient teachers such as Confucius and Plato have much to teach undergraduate business students about education, friendship, aspirations, disappointments, and life.

A more relevant version of the great books curriculum would be a global great books curriculum that includes more than just the European intellectual tradition. Such a curriculum would afford students boundless opportunities to compare and contrast the different intellectual traditions through the Discussion Method. A comparison of the Chinese and Greek

traditions, for instance, highlights similarities in human thought. Knowing these similarities is important in the business context because it impels us to look beyond our phenotypical differences and to search for solutions beyond the familiar. As such, we as workers, customers, suppliers, investors, and regulators can form relationships based on our common humanity in our pursuit of the common good. Like the Italian poet and humanist Petrarch (1304–1374), the Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130–1200) in his *Learning to be a Sage* emphasizes how reading the great books allows us to converse with authors: “It’s like speaking with them face to face” (as cited in Hui 2019 p. 35). A hidden assumption in Petrarch and Zhu Xi that is worth excavating is the implied high comfort level with books and book learning. Key to this high comfort level includes knowing how to read, how to dissect, analyze, and compare and contrast texts. Reading and discussing works by Petrarch, Confucius, and Zhu Xi affords valuable opportunities for undergraduate business students to sharpen their critical interpretive skills. These critical skills can give business students a competitive advantage in their ability to interpret documents from sales-related contracts to non-compete agreements. In this way, it would be normal for an undergraduate business curriculum that integrates the liberal arts to offer a course titled “Interpreting Contracts, Confucius, and Petrarch” to improve students’ literary and critical interpretive skills through the Discussion Method.

What we also learn through an integrated comparative approach are the commonalities shared by the Chinese and European traditions. Zhu Xi, echoes Socrates in the *Meno*, writes about how

[b]ook learning is important because we need books to help us remember what is our original nature, “from the very beginning, nothing has been added to us from the outside” (4.2). “When reading the Six Classics, it should be just as if there were no Six Classics. We’re simply seeking the moral principles in ourselves—this principle is easy to understand” (5.41) (as cited in Hui 2019 p. 36).

Quite appropriately, applying the Discussion Method while reading the Chinese Six Classics would go far in helping us remember what we already know. Both Socrates in the *Phaedrus* and Zhu Xi agree that the dialectical method is a highly effective pedagogy in helping us recall what is already in us (Hui 2019 p. 36). What is important about this integrated comparative approach is its ability to show that humans across space, time, and cultures believe that our knowledge of right and wrong is innate. Similarly, Confucius reaffirms what teachers know to be true from firsthand experience, namely lecturing to a room full of unquestioning passive students is agony:

I will not open the door for a mind that is not already striving to understand, nor will I provide words to a tongue that is not already struggling to speak. If I hold up one corner of a problem, and the student cannot come back to me with the other three, I will not attempt to instruct him again. [*The Analects* 7.8] (as cited in Hui 2019 pp. 31-32).

On the one hand, I am unsure whether it is comforting or distressing to know that it was as agonizing for Confucius as it is for us to teach passive and unmotivated students. On the other hand, I feel assured knowing that both Confucius and we teachers are most animated and effective when students are trying their best to hold up their end of the intellectual back-and-forth. The Master enjoys teaching the most when, like playing tennis with someone who is a little better than us, students can push us to be our best. In short, my point is that relative to lectures, the Discussion Method is much more effective at teaching students how to keep the rally going,

which, in turn, animates and energizes teachers to be the most effective facilitator in a discussion-based class.

Some believe there is an almost symbiotic relationship between the Western intellectual tradition and the Discussion Method. Citing former University of Chicago president and chief proponent of the required great books sequence, this commentator highlights this passage by Robert Maynard Hutchins: "...The spirit of Western civilization is the spirit of inquiry. Its dominant element is the *Logos*. Nothing is to remain undiscussed. Everybody is to speak his mind. No proposition is to be left unexamined..." (Adler 1983 p.192). In this respect, the focus on the great books of the Western World offer a robust resource for teaching the Discussion Method, with the *Logos* as the prime mover. For Hutchins, anything can be discussed by anyone and any question can be asked by anyone, with curiosity as the sole governor. Hutchins holds that every assertion must be scrutinized before it can be accepted. Administrators and instructors alike should follow Hutchins and embody his benchmark in course design, implementation, and assessment if our goal is to prepare students for the workplace and for life.

Part II

The Discussion Method: The Employability Problem

Since ancient Greece, the spirit of inquiry has been responsible for advancements from astronomy to political philosophy. But how and why did the Discussion Method lose its value in higher education? How and why did *Logos* give way to market forces and the focus on student employability? How did freedom of speech and scrutiny of ideas, which are essential elements of learning how to read, write, and speak, become the enemy of students and parents? A partial answer can be had from the president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities Lynn Pasquerella's summary of how parents and students view the liberal arts, "Liberal education is viewed as taking place in the ivory tower, with a willful disconnect from the matters of everyday life" (Leckrone 2020). For readers familiar with the liberal arts and from what has already been discussed above, we know this general view is misinformed. The potential of a liberal education, moreover, is not limited to understanding the ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI), health data analytics, or collateralized debt obligations. Parents and students are concerned with employability. Their concerns have caused administrators to worry about it, too.

To improve students' employability, many business schools have introduced action learning and experiential learning. In action learning, students start in a lecture setting before turning their attention to solving real-life workplace problems of employers (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management). Experiential learning often takes the form of internships or community service opportunities that range from designing algorithms to detecting melanoma to improving outcomes for at-risk youth (Massachusetts Institute of Technology – Office of the Vice Chancellor – Office of Experiential Learning). In both instances, students benefit from hands-on learning. Action and experiential learning are an improvement from learning in lectures and may go as far as placing students in situations where they are forced to think independently. To strengthen these classroom innovations, there is no need to look further than the Discussion Method. An additional innovation to be had is in adding the century-old Discussion Method as an analytic tool to help students dissect and

discover their way to solutions to real-life problems. The Discussion Method can even be implemented at the beginning of action and experiential learning projects to deepen students' understanding of the client's context and challenges. Through this combination, students learn how to solve highly intractable or technical problems using a very low-technology method – discussions. It is classroom innovations like this that can instill in students an appreciation for lifelong learning.

With the phrase lifelong learning's ubiquity we have perhaps forgotten to ask: Do students and workers know how to teach themselves? If the answer is no, then how can students and workers practice lifelong learning independently? How can students and workers adapt to future changes by getting ahead of the curve if colleges and universities do not teach students how to teach themselves? The World Economic Forum (2016) urges businesses, governments, and higher education institutions to work together to remedy the siloed approach to teaching business, liberal arts, and sciences. Silos not only do not reflect workplace reality, but also "hinder progress on today's talent and labor market issues" (p.32). The top skills most in demand by employers are communication (written and verbal), problem solving, critical thinking, working in complex and ambiguous environments, and working in teams (Adams 2014; Jenkins 2019; National Association of Colleges and Employers 2020). The shelf life of technical knowledge is approximately five years. Professor John Yu, former Director of Experimental Hematology in the Department of Molecular & Experimental Medicine at The Scripps Research Institute, emphasizes technical knowledge's obsolescence and the importance of receiving a broad and integrated education this way: "I tell my own students that if all they learn is the technical aspects of sciences, eighty percent of that knowledge will become obsolete in a short period of time. Then what have you learned?" (J.Yu. M.D. Ph.D., personal communication, 01 January 2007). Fortunately, there is an antidote in waiting. Undergraduate business programs need to use the Discussion Method and apply it throughout a curriculum that integrates business, liberal arts, and sciences to teach students skills that are foundational: how to learn, how to teach oneself, how to speak clearly, how to think critically, how to work in complex and ambiguous environments, and how to work in teams.

In an era where we are only beginning to witness artificial intelligence's disruption of work, foundational skills are more important than ever. Radiologists and accountants, despite years of schooling and large student loans, are not immune from the forces unleashed by globalization and managers' attendant race to the bottom in wages. Similar to globalization, AI's disruptive forces will impact both high- and low-skilled workers. Unlike globalization, firms can potentially automate the tasks of truck drivers, information technology (IT) managers, and radiologists. A senior IT industry analyst put it this way: "From the perspective of the C-suite, IT ops is simply a cost center, so if AI can drive down costs while improving performance and quality, such a move would be obvious. The same goes for marketing, finance, or any other function or department that is not strategic to the organization" (Bloomberg 2018). For parents as well as undergraduates majoring in these "cost center majors," Bloomberg's observation should serve as a wake-up call. The lesson here is that although viewing college education as vocational training may yield satisfactory short-term results, it may also cause long-term distress when a tectonic shift arrives with little to no warning. According to a study conducted by economists at the consultancy PricewaterhouseCoopers, up to 38 and 37% of American and German jobs, respectively, could be automated by 2030 (Berriman and Hawksorth 2018 p. 16). Perhaps less sanguine is the former president of Google China's analysis based on his

experience as an AI researcher and investor. Kai-Fu Lee (2018) posits that there will be

....industry-wide disruptions due to new AI-powered business models (162: 2018)...
Within two to twenty years, I estimate we will be technically capable of automating 40 to 50 percent of jobs in the United States. For employers who are not outright replaced, increasing automation of their workload will continue to cut into their value-add for the company....(p. 164)

By analyzing demographics, AI, and inequality, the consultancy Bain offers an even more threatening conclusion: by 2030, labor demand will drop by 20 to 25% or 30 to 40 million workers in the U.S. AI will impact 80% of American workers through either job loss, wage stagnation, or both. Although the Bain analysts recognize that these seismic shifts will create new jobs, they do not believe it will meaningfully offset said loss and stagnation (Harris et al. 2018). To be sure, the Discussion Method applied throughout a curriculum that integrates business, liberal arts, and sciences cannot forestall the AI juggernaut. What it can do, however, is to prepare students to have the mental agility to design value-added tasks within their jobs and business functions that do not fall prey to AI's disruption. With so much potential for good, parents and students will hopefully learn to see an integrated undergraduate business education as a reliable friend who is preparing students for the unpredictable nature of work.

An integrated undergraduate business education fosters the ability to synthesize ideas (Henning 2008) across multiple disciplines, which is the precursor to adaptability, creativity, and innovation. As AI introduces further uncertainties into society, colleges and universities are urged to fully support the Discussion Method and apply it throughout an integrated curriculum. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching goes further by delineating Analytical Thinking, Multiple Framing, the Reflective Exploration of Meaning, and Practical Reasoning as the four central dimensions of liberal learning (Colby et al. 2011 pp. 59–69). Of equal significance is the Carnegie Foundation's recommendation that if business students are to be responsible professionals, citizens, and humans, they must "gain the essence of liberal learning" through courses that broadly and fully integrate business, liberal arts, and sciences alongside the Discussion Method (Colby et al. 2011 pp. 70–87). The Carnegie Foundation highlights how the disintegrated nature of how the university is structured leads to the disintegrated nature of undergraduate learning and is a cause of how students are ill-prepared for solving workplace problems. The solution, the Carnegie Foundation concludes, is greater curricular integration. For an example of a typical set of distribution requirements that require students to take courses in different areas of study, see University of Michigan – College of Literature, Science, and the Arts – LSA Requirements. Alternatively, in Multiple Framing, the Carnegie Foundation sees value in "[t]he more students are able to understand ideas as contextually rooted, the broader, richer, and more sophisticated their thinking will be" (Colby et al. 2011 p. 74). In order to appreciate and negotiate ambiguity, "[s]tudents must learn to call into question assumptions that they had previously taken for granted and to see that beginning with different assumptions often leads to dramatically different interpretations with potentially divergent implications for how one operates in the world" (Colby et al. 2011 p. 75). In the business context, a statement such as "A reasonable day's work approximates the greatest amount of work an employee could physically do without collapsing" makes good sense to a capitalist trying to maximize profit (Grey 2017). Viewed from the employee's perspective, however, the same statement shouts exploitation. Here, being able to see said statement from two opposing perspectives has the potential to

persuade capitalists to offer kinder human resources policies in the workplace. For employees, training in Multiple Framing equips them to understand the business owner's inclination to focus on the bottom line. This understanding of the managerial mindset, in turn, affords employees stronger advocacy and union organizing capabilities. For other stakeholders, training in Multiple Framing heightens appreciation of humanistic management principles that fairness is achieved when labor and management's interests and expectations are balanced.

Part III

The Discussion Method: Moral Reasoning

The Discussion Method, when used with reading and analyzing the classics, can give business students the “scaffolding and context within which students can better learn to think for themselves” (Colby et al. 2011 p. 58). These scaffoldings are valuable resources in guiding students' moral development by facilitating their ability to think through questions such as “What do I really believe in, what kind of person do I want to be, what kind of world do I want to live in, and what kind of contribution can I make to that world?” (Colby et al. 2011 p. 79). An important outcome of an integrated undergraduate business education that fully embraces the Discussion Method is the attainment of a critical mass of self-knowledge and solid moral grounding lest students find themselves trapped by the following relativism: “What is right in the corporation is not what is right in a man's home or in his church. *What is right in the corporation is what the guy above you wants from you.* That's what morality is in the corporation” (Jackall 1989 p. 6). Put differently, students who have not had opportunities to discuss and to examine who they are, who they want to be, what kind of world they want to live in, and what they want their legacy to be will be severely challenged by organizational expedients.

When these expedients are presented as career advancing, students who lack self-knowledge are probably less likely to rely on their ethical and religious beliefs. Because the Reflective Exploration of Meaning dimension is the “traditional heart of liberal education” (Colby et al. 2011 p. 60), undergraduate business programs are well-advised to leverage liberal education's expertise in strengthening students' moral scaffold. To this end, ethics discussions can help students make more informed decisions when they find themselves in situations similar to former Wells Fargo CEO John Stumpf or former Enron CFO Andrew Fastow are interdisciplinary courses like Bentley University's The Philosophy of Work and New York University Stern School of Business's Professional Responsibility and Leadership (Colby et al. 2011) that integrate the Discussion Method and classical texts. The course designs at Bentley and NYU are important because students are exposed to questions about how incentives can be restructured to promote the common good and not the private interests of the extremely wealthy (Korten 2019). Although the data is inconclusive as to whether academic study of ethics will help students pursue the more ethical choice, even when they know the difference between ethical and unethical, “exposing students to ethical principles can make them less dogmatic and more tolerant, while being more clear about their own value commitments” (Dudani 2014). John Stumpf oversaw a Wells Fargo that pressured its employees to create 3.5 million fake accounts in order to meet sales targets. As punishment, Stumpf forfeited \$70 million in compensation and paid a \$17.5 million fine (Egan 2017; Ensign and Eisen 2019). In 2018, Fastow, who received a six-year sentence for fraud and stealing from Enron (Nocera

2006), told the Certified Financial Analysts (CFA) Society of Detroit that “there’s such a fine line between following the rules and going just close enough to the edge to generate financial gain.” Fastow noted that “he never once while working at Enron thought he was committing fraud” (Tompore 2018). Reflecting on his decision not to play in a championship game as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford University, the late-Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen (Christensen 2010) wrote:

The lesson I learned from this is that it’s easier to hold to your principles 100% of the time than it is to hold to them 98% of the time. If you give in to “just this once,” based on a marginal cost analysis, as some of my former classmates have done, you’ll regret where you end up. You’ve got to define for yourself what you stand for and draw the line in a safe place (sec. 5 Avoid the “Marginal Costs” Mistake, para 6).

One of the former Harvard Business School classmates Christensen was referring to was Jeff Skilling. Skilling served as Enron CEO and was convicted of 18 counts of fraud and conspiracy and one count of insider trading. For this, Skilling served 12 years in prison and returned \$42 million to his victims (Stevens and Haag 2019). Analyzing Fastow’s CFA presentation through Christensen’s lens, we get the sense that perhaps the former Enron CFO either did not have the chance to reflect on his life’s purpose, who he was, what he wanted to be, what kind of world he wanted to live in, and what he wanted his legacy to be. For Stumpf, Skilling, and Fastow, their ethical and legal problems began when they allowed themselves to “break the rules just this one time” (Christensen 2010). Beginning with “just this one time” and in the face of massive financial gains, it became increasingly more difficult for these three former executives to rationalize where and why they should adhere to the vacuous principles that they never had the chance to solidify for themselves. Stumpf, Skilling, and Fastow stand as cautionary tales why guiding students to partake in discussions about self-exploration, identity, and self-understanding can serve as methods “to teaching students to fruitfully and confidently engage in ethical dialogue” (Dudani 2014).

There are those who tend to use the likes of Stumpf, Skilling, and Fastow as counterarguments to teaching ethics. Although ethics discussions alone cannot serve as a prophylactic against moral malfeasance, we need to appreciate the role institutions such as the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines Compliance System, the judiciary, and enforcement mechanisms play in deterring those who are inclined toward the unethical. Within our capitalistic market system, the constant urge to maximize profits leads market adherents to see exploitation as not an ethical choice, but rather a moral obligation. In this respect, the market is at minimum a culprit if ethics discussions are also at fault (Berenbeim 2013). In the end, the Discussion Method can at least strengthen ethics courses to enhance students’ ability to see multiple perspectives, analyze and resolve ethics issues as well as foster procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice within organizations (Berenbeim 2013; Colquitt et al. 2019).

The Discussion Method: Precursor to Discovery

The Discussion Method encourages students to think beyond standard assumptions (Colby et al. 2011 p. 97) and to interrogate the practice of accepting theoretical models as reality. According to former University of Chicago president Robert Maynard Hutchins, the Discussion Method lies at the heart of liberal education because we need to be in conversation with others in order to learn and to grow (Colby et al. 2011 p. 106). Hutchins’ view is consistent with the African notion of *Ubuntu*, meaning “I am who I am through others” (as cited in

Adeleye et al. 2011 p. 343). Central to the Discussion Method is each student's willingness to share and contribute their private thoughts for the common good. If normalized with institutional support, a business student's willingness to share her ideas to advance collective learning can be the pathway for students to become humanistic managers who promote the common good. Like science, the Discussion Method is not an individual sport. Science, at its core, is shared knowledge (Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, and National Academy of Engineering 1995). The Discussion Method's spirit is consistent with science's sharing culture. Scientific progress and theory confirmation are both dependent on sharing or publications. Likewise, the Discussion Method in undergraduate business education succeeds when students recognize that everyone's learning is built upon everyone else's hard work. Like science, the Discussion Method, at its core, is shared knowledge.

The collaborative nature of the Discussion Method teaches students to work as a team to problem solve in real time. In this way, the Discussion Method sharpens students' ability to think on their feet, to ask probing questions, to build arguments and counterarguments, and to learn from opposing viewpoints. This is important to parents and students because learning to work in teams and sharpening one's ability to think on one's feet increase workplace success, which, in turn, maximizes students' pursuit and attainment of happiness. In an integrated curriculum where students are actively helping everyone else learn in, they will view learning collectively as synonymous with promoting the common good:

“They therefore content themselves with inquiring whether the personal advantage of each member of the community does not consist in working for the good of all And it is held as a truth that man serves himself in serving his fellow creatures and that his private interest is to do good” [Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* II, bk. 2 viii.] (as cited in Brann 1979 p. 53).

In this way, the regular application of the Discussion Method will demonstrate how “expert knowledge, skill in application, and an acquired identity in which individual interest is subordinated to group norms revolving around the service of a greater good” (Khurana 2011 p. 119). Nothing would please society more than to see students revitalize the professionalism to which business school have originally sought to instill in their graduates and to put to rest contemporary managers' reputation as “incompetent at best, and venal and untrustworthy at worst” (Khurana 2011 p. 119).

Steve Jobs' ability to synthesize shared knowledge embodied the integration of business, the liberal arts, and the sciences in the real world. The co-founder of Apple dropped out of Reed College in Oregon but stayed on campus to audit courses that captivated his imagination. Jobs' free spirit infused his study plan. In so doing, he made connections between seemingly disparate concepts, including following his love of calligraphy and learning about serif and sans serif typefaces. Later, Jobs incorporated what he learned about calligraphy and proportionally spaced fonts at Reed College into the Mac (Isaacson 2011 p. 40–41). Jobs' faith in the liberal arts went beyond how it was manifested in the Mac. Those who believe the liberal arts embody a willful disconnect from reality will find it challenging to explain how the act of writing and the use of a computer are disconnected from our everyday reality. To make this point even clearer and contemporaneous to the year 2020, it would be even more challenging to explain how our smartphones are disconnected from our everyday reality. Afterall, every smartphone is a progeny of the Apple iPhone, which Steve Jobs introduced to the world at MacWorld 2007. If there is anyone who embodies the spirit of the liberal arts and its relevance to everyday reality, it is Steve Jobs. Frankly, the problem is not with liberal education. Current

Apple CEO Tim Cook summarized his understanding of the technology-liberal arts partnership this way: “If science is a search in the darkness, then the humanities are a candle that shows us where we have been and the danger that lies ahead. It is technology married with the liberal arts, married with the humanities, that makes our hearts sing” (Chandler 2017). According to former Harvard University president Drew Faust, “[liberal arts] helps you scrutinize what’s at hand even through the thick dust of danger, or drama, or disorienting strangeness” (The Big Idea Club 2017). Professor John Yu, former Director of Experimental Hematology in the Department of Molecular & Experimental Medicine at The Scripps Research Institute, underscores how his graduate school advisors instilled in him the urgency with which scientific training must be tempered with social awareness: “

If you stayed in the U.S. for a long time, you’ll see that many American scientists are not only aware of their own science, but also have deep concerns for society. When we were at The University of Chicago, there was a geneticist who later won the Nobel Prize for his work on corn. It was just amazing how much time he spent monitoring the persecution of Russian scientists . . .

A famous University of Chicago scholar who conducted research on evolution was very outspoken in his protest against the Vietnam War. He knew of events in Taiwanese politics that I had never heard of while growing up on Taiwan. These scientists partnered with Amnesty International to advocate on behalf of political prisoners in Taiwan in the 1970s by putting up advertisements in the *New York Times* . . . (J.Yu. M.D. Ph.D., personal communication, 01 January 2007).

Critics may argue that Apple’s philanthropy may not have supported the liberal arts to the same degree it has sponsored STEM education. But Apple’s appreciation of the need for the humanities to serve as the beacon in a dangerous world is consistent with Drew Faust’s belief in the liberal arts’ function as the scaffolding to help Army cadets and captains to see the big and small pictures. As an international graduate student, John Yu learned not only science, but also gained a social consciousness that grounded his future stem cell research. Taken together, the Discussion Method’s role as the analytic tool that scrutinizes the issue at hand, be it smartphone user privacy, just war theory, or the ethics of stem cell research requires a solid foundation in the liberal arts. The integration of the sciences, the liberal arts, and business is key to students and managers’ ability to fully analyze the issue at hand. The Discussion Method teaches business, the liberal arts, and the sciences to communicate with one another. The skills students learn from the Discussion Method such as how to reconcile opposing arguments; how to think on one’s own two feet; and how to integrate new ideas from disparate perspectives and disciplines are what strengthen technology firms (Anders 2015).

There is nothing wrong with the liberal arts and Steve Jobs knew this. The problem is with the general public’s misunderstanding of the liberal arts and their reluctance to take the long view. In other words, parents’ and students’ dependence on instant gratification, of which trophy culture and student-debt are partly to blame, has led to the inclusion of employability, salary one year after graduation, and salary 10 years after graduation as indices of college ranking and the exclusion of important metrics such as student to faculty ratio (see *Times Higher Education Global University Employability Ranking* 2019; U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard 2020). These college rankings are perpetuating the vicious cycle of leading the general public with a questionable understanding of the purpose of as well as how to measure the quality of a college education. Strictly speaking, the purpose of an

education is to liberate students from the shackles of conventions (Brann 1979 p. 60). That is, freeing Steve Jobs the college student from the pressure to conform, to dress alike, to think alike. And freeing Steve Jobs the adult from the pressure to conform to “best practices” without asking the crucial question “Is this best practice best for me?” Had Steve Jobs conformed, he would not have co-founded Apple Computer, and the world would not see the Mac and the iPhone.

The Discussion Method: The Classroom

What does an undergraduate business class using the Discussion Method look like? Here is Adler’s prescription for the Discussion Method. Adler’s prescription is appropriate for any academic discipline, from biomedical engineering to business. Class length between 90 to 120 min is ideal. Chairs surrounding a rectangular table seating no more than 25 students. Students must have a flexible and open mindset to different points of view – being stubborn is not a virtue. The instructors’ job is (1) to facilitate the discussion and to keep it on track by asking questions; (2) to encourage students to analyze both the implications of and the rationale behind each response; and (3) to ensure an engagement of opposing viewpoints. Instructors must exercise active listening and be forewarn by the likelihood of fatigue caused by listening and questioning. To achieve the intended results of the Discussion Method, instructors must pose questions that raise more questions than answers, complex questions with related parts, and hypothetical questions with high-value implications. Instructors must take seriously the job of ensuring that every student understands their questions. Instructors must hold each student accountable for giving direct answers to their questions and not just taking up valuable airtime without investing the effort their questions deserve. As such, students should be instructed not to answer until they fully understand each question. Neither students nor instructors should tolerate less than full effort in listening and in speaking. Every statement must be supported by evidence (Adler 1983 pp. 173–176).

The challenge, of course, is unless Adler’s prescriptions are fully followed, the Discussion Method will probably not be as effective as it was designed to be. This is where full institutional support is critical to the success of implementing the Discussion Method. If the Discussion Method is normalized as the default pedagogy in undergraduate business education, then students will accept it as the standard. If the Discussion Method is only tolerated but does not enjoy institutional support, students will not take it seriously and may in fact, avoid it in favor of “easier” courses. In this scenario, we can imagine three potential responses from students. First, students might respond with the attitude that Discussion Method courses are “easier” because they had firsthand experience with the Discussion Method in secondary school and found it to be a highly effective way to learn. Second, students might respond with the attitude that large lectures are “easier” because they have the discipline, motivation, and academic skills to succeed in a passive learning environment. Third, students might respond with the attitude that large lectures are the norm. From this third attitude, students might perceive the Discussion Method as an instructor’s decision to make classes unnecessarily difficult. Certainly, such doubts can be allayed to a certain extent if instructors explained the intellectual history, rationale, and benefits of the Discussion Method. Only full institutional support, however, can normalize what the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has recommended. As adherents of institutional theory, colleges and universities recognize that unless they see adaptation of the Discussion Method and the Carnegie Foundation’s recommendations by Ivy-Plus, Big Ten, Land Grant, and other similar institutions,

administrators are unlikely to risk self-marginalization and adopt these changes even if they believe it leads to better student learning outcomes than large lectures.

The Discussion Method is a highly effective form of active learning. It requires students to be active participants in their own learning. It helps students recognize the role diversity of ideas plays in enhancing the learning of every student, for it is the clash of disparate ideas in an open forum that forces students to ask questions, to think, to examine, and to understand the source and reason behind these ideas. In the process, empathy begins to take shape. Some believe management is a “talking game” (Spender 2017). As such, the Discussion Method has much to offer those who want to improve their skills as talkers and listeners. For those who value team-based learning, the Discussion Method teaches interdependence among classmates to achieve collective and individual benefits. In so doing, the Discussion Method honors the freedom of each student by involving them as much as possible in the conversations that impact their education, which, in turn, impact their lives (Dierksmeier 2016).

Programs designed to integrate business, the liberal arts, and sciences must have dedicated courses taught by instructors who are well-versed in these three areas. Readings in these integrated courses need to be selected with an eye to teaching students how the liberal arts and sciences offer a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between business and society. For instance, an in-depth understanding of labor history and artificial intelligence can more accurately inform our understanding of the future of work. In terms of global supply chain, sustainability, and the profit motive, courses in computer science, material science, East Asian art, literature, geography, history, and politics can go far in helping students comprehend events ranging from Yahoo’s decision to acquiesce to the Chinese government’s request for the identity of a Yahoo! Mail account holder (Kahn 2005) to the lingering tension between two of America’s strongest allies, Japan and South Korea. As such, students will be able to analyze how this bilateral tension has manifested itself into a trade conflict and South Korea’s refusal to share military intelligence with Japan (Choe et al. 2019). This refusal has not only caused disturbances in the supply of semiconductors, aluminum, and copper (Fujikawa and Jun 2019), but also explained why Chinese and Russian military aircraft are increasing flights into Japanese and South Korean airspace (Jeong 2019).

Another case in point is a course I teach at Purdue University: Managing Human Capital Globally. In this undergraduate management course, I use the Discussion Method. Required texts include Weijian Shan’s (2019) *Out of the Gobi*, Kai-Fu Lee’s ((Lee 2018) *AI Superpowers*, and Andrew Molinsky’s (2013) *Global Dexterity*. These three texts are carefully selected to provide a broad and meaningful context in which to teach students the transdisciplinary nature of workplace challenges. The course is designed to teach students how to identify and analyze cultural, economic, historical, political, and social variables. In our time, globalization has transformed international business into local business. This course, in addition, is designed to challenge the myth that we Americans can continue to succeed by being monolingual and isolationists. I begin each day with a short quiz on the assigned reading. The quiz questions then serve as the guide for class discussions. Shan’s *Out of the Gobi* is discussed for the first seven weeks. This book offers an excellent personal account of contemporary Chinese history. The next three weeks is spent understanding China and Silicon Valley’s diverging approaches to AI and entrepreneurship through the eyes of one of the biggest names in AI. The final three weeks of the semester teaches students skills in global cultural dexterity. Depending on the dynamics of each cohort, the quality of class discussions fluctuates from year to year. As of this writing, COVID-19, the course content itself, and China’s recently passed National Security Law are all competing to impact the quality of class

discussions. Tables 2 and 3 itemize student generated learning outcomes when this discussion-based course was previously offered.

The Discussion Method: Students and Teachers

The Discussion Method benefits students of all backgrounds and abilities. Regardless of academic ability, the strongest predictors of student success are thirst for knowledge and the desire to learn. Students who enjoy making an effort to see the connection between different disciplines will enjoy the Discussion Method. Former St. John's College president Edwin Delattre stated that in a college curriculum where the Discussion Method is infused into an integrated curriculum, "diligence counts for more than brilliance in coming to grips with hard questions" (Marquand 1985). There is truth to this claim as it is often easier to see improvement at the lower end of the bell curve than it is at the higher end. In addition, most of us know from firsthand experience that hard work pays greater dividends than simply resting on our laurels.

A case in point is the New York University Stern School of Business course Professional Responsibility and Leadership. In order to simulate real-life problems, Bruce Buchanan, the lead instructor surprises students with cases at the beginning of class. NYU students are then required to work in teams to apply their business knowledge and to draw from history, philosophy, literature in their real-time problem solving. NYU business students are expected to demonstrate their ability to apply what they have learned from Chekhov, Whitman, Confucius, Plato, Cicero, and Machiavelli in how they solve business problems (Colby et al. 2011 pp. 56–57). At Bentley University, the Philosophy of Work course guides students in their inquiry into the nature of work through their own work experience, and by asking students why they work and what they need from work. Drawing from literature, history, philosophy, and public policy, the course helps students understand how globalization, workers' rights, gender equity, and ethics impact students' understanding of work and the workplace (Colby et al. 2011 pp. 80–81). The final example comes from Santa Clara University's capstone strategy course. In the heart of Silicon Valley, Professor Gregory Baker uses case studies and the Discussion Method to teach students the importance of asking the right questions, seeing the right alternatives, and how the most obvious approach often is not the best approach. Baker guides his students to interrogate ethical issues surrounding intellectual property rights and how public funding of scientific research at times enriches private entities at the expense of the common good (Colby et al. 2011 pp. 84–86).

Any instructor with an interest in business has the potential to succeed in teaching the Discussion Method. For instance, an economic historian, an electrical engineer, a medicinal chemist, a workplace sociologist, an English professor versed in analyzing advertising as text, and a social media ethicist are all excellent candidates for teaching the Discussion Method. Any instructor who believes in the Discussion Method and has an interest in business will likely succeed. The more challenging situation is when an instructor has no interest in discussion-based pedagogy and has no knowledge of business. When this is the case, it will be difficult for these instructors to use the Discussion Method to help students draw connections across the liberal arts, the sciences, and business disciplines as well as to cite business examples to illustrate concepts. In addition, instructors lacking knowledge in business will more likely deliver courses that appear to be disconnected and irrelevant to business students.

The foundation of such transdisciplinary fluency is discussion-based classes that invite students to engage in discussions guided by the rule that evidence and logic are the final arbiter. Discussion-based classes have much to offer students because the aim of a liberal education is to free students

from the horde of like-minded peers who are unwittingly molding themselves into fungible human capital. According to Kant, as fungible human capital, employees “can be replaced by something else as its equivalent.” As individual human beings, each employee “is above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent and has a dignity” (Pirson 2016). Drawing from my own experience with the Discussion Method while a student at St. John’s College, I know the following to be true. Through the Discussion Method, students gain the self-confidence to articulate their own views supported by evidence and logic. When students repeat the hard work of textual analysis and active listening in every class for four years, they will be pleasantly surprised by their own ability to generate new ideas.

According to Kant, daring to know, daring to use one’s own reason rather than pursuing the easier path of following authority is the foundation of Western thought since the Enlightenment (Grey 2017). As such, there is every reason for the Discussion Method to be an integral part of a student’s business education. The Discussion Method is part of the liberal arts because, according to Kant, the courage to follow our curiosity guided only by logic and reason instead of accepting the unquestioned wisdom of authority is the road to intellectual independence (Grey 2017). Discussion-based learning is all about reading, thinking, analyzing, dissecting, interpreting, evaluating, and testing. This method can help students of any level and ability learn any subject. Unconstrained by disciplinary loyalty and fully cognizant of the artificiality of disciplinary barriers, business students fully immersed in the Discussion Method will be able to ask tough questions and solve difficult problems. The obligation to dissent, a key element of the consultancy McKinsey, leads to the best possible solutions because employees are not held back by fear – they are free to articulate dissent. Likewise, the Discussion Method infused into an integrated business education prepares students to thrive where analysis, argumentation, and asking tough questions are valued (Taylor 2017).

The pandemic has found a way to teach students in large lecture classes using the Discussion Method. If COVID-19 has taught me anything, it is that my students enjoy Zoom discussions on mandatory Fridays much more than my attempts at in-person discussions on “attendance-not-required” Mondays and Wednesdays with the 20% of students who are present in a large lecture room with a pre-COVID capacity for over 100. I know this is true because of the numerous conversations I have had with students in fall 2020. That is, when students are given the opportunity to experience it, they enjoy discussions and recognize its inherent educational value. To be sure, there are undergraduates who prefer the anonymity large research universities offer and dislike my use of discussions in class. But the university’s fall 2020 requirement that we instructors implement the active learning flipped classroom model in response to COVID-19 means that we place recorded lectures online for students to watch before they attend class. In Organizational Behavior where enrollment is between 70 to 95, students prepare by watching pre-recorded lectures and writing down their answers to discussion questions posted on the course website. When we meet in person, I begin each class by asking students to share their answers to these discussion questions. Next, I ask follow-up questions designed to guide students to think about the rationale behind their answer. After that, I ask additional questions to guide students to think about how the concepts covered by one question relates to other concepts in the book and in the workplace. To prepare for these discussions, students have to prepare for class. Once they are in class, they also have to stay engaged with their eyes and ears. Because of the mandatory active learning flipped classroom model, students immediately recognized how their workload spiked. This is probably the major cause of low attendance on “attendance-not-required” Mondays and Wednesdays. In other words, students realize how labor intensive it is to prepare for class and to stay engaged once in class. The 80% that elect to stay home and watch the recordings afterwards negate the benefits of the flipped classroom model because watching a video is a passive act.

In “Introduction to Organizational Behavior – Honors,” in order to align course materials, pedagogy, and students’ varying experiences with discussions, I used a modified version of The Discussion Method described above. In this modified version, I asked students to bring to class a question they formulated on their own after they have completed the assigned reading. The first few minutes of each class is then spent asking students to articulate their questions while I write them on the board. We then discuss each question one-by-one. Table 1 is a representative sample of high-quality questions formulated by students in “Introduction to Organizational Behavior – Honors,” taught in spring 2019. Data in Table 1 demonstrates the level undergraduates can rise to when expectations are set high. Similarly, these questions underscore how undergraduates can make thoughtful connections between different course materials. Knowing that every class meeting begins with every student sharing a question of their own about the assigned reading for the day, every student rise to the occasion. Whether the motivation is to conform to social pressure, to avoid embarrassment, or to contribute to group learning, I observed a consistently high level of student performance. In this spring 2019 course, no student wanted to be seen by their peers as a slacker. Every student wanted to help their classmates learn the course material.

The questions in Table 1 track the course’s required readings: *Moral Mazes* by Robert Jackall, *Engineering Culture* by Gideon Kunda, *Competing Devotions* by Mary Blair-Loy, and *A Company of One* by Carrie M. Lane. As such, these questions include topics such as ethics, culture, norms, and boundaries of organizations; identities and personas of workers; career and family devotion schemas; white-collar unemployment; gender roles; social stratification; and the nature and meaning of work. Recognizing that publicly labeling the quality of each question in the classroom goes against American higher education culture at the undergraduate level (at least in the Midwest region), I refrained from such commentary in the classroom. On many days, the high-quality questions beget deep conversations that cause the class to run out of time to cover every question. Some days, to maintain fairness, I ask students to choose the questions on the board they want to discuss. Other days, I choose which questions to discuss to ensure key points are examined.

As the instructor, the extent to which I facilitate a discussion, ask guiding questions, explain concepts, keep the conversation focused on the text, or highlight main points depends on the students’ ability to help each other learn through the discussion. Some cohorts are highly capable and independent while others require more guidance and explanation. Key to early success is having a discussion about discussion-based classes where I introduce the different comments students can make. For some cohorts, a mid-semester reminder is needed to maintain momentum. Examples of these different types of comments students can make in order to enter the discussion include:

You can ask a question about a question someone else has made.

You can respond to comments others have made by agreeing, disagreeing, or offering further commentary. In each situation, you need to cite evidence from the text to support your position.

You can ask questions about the reading to help you better understand what you have read.

If you are asked a question but you feel unsure how to respond. The most effective thing to say is to explain what you do and do not understand about the question and the text. In so doing, you are then inviting everyone in class to help you better understand the text

Table 1 Students' self-formulated questions from "Introduction to Organizational Behavior – Honors"

(1) Is there a way to "regulate" the inner circle of executives?
(2) What is the "correct" balance between centralized and decentralized power?
(3) Why do we let the presentation style of one worker represent a firm's service or idea?
(4) How are perception, luck, and career progress related?
(5) Do you need a mask to hold a position of power?
(6) Can someone be a good team player without running into the harms that confirmation bias brings?
(7) If an organizational culture changes, do possible promotions for John and Mary become obsolete?
(8) Is normative control a form or tyranny or a movement of liberation?
(9) Is there a way to properly structure normative control to minimize the negatives?
(10) Where is the boundary between formality and informality?
(11) How do the different wage classes affect the performance of individual employees?
(12) How is tech culture similar or different from family culture?
(13) What dangers are present in leaving a rule such as "Do what's right" ambiguous?
(14) Can you say "No?" How often?
(15) Who sets boundaries? Organizations or employees?
(16) Is your organization self your true self?
(17) What is the difference between multiple selves and masks?
(18) Who has a stronger sense of organizational self, management or lower level workers?
(19) Given the influence of normative control, how does one maintain work / life boundaries?
(20) Are organizations controlling or are employees allowing themselves to be controlled?
(21) Is there a way to prevent the loss of self or should we bother?
(22) What's the point of an organization if the organization man needs to rebel against the organization?
(23) Does looser control create more or less confusion within an organization?
(24) Do women have to be more devoted at work to see the same results as men?
(25) Does work lead us to a sense of singlemindedness? If so, how can we restore balance?
(26) Does the pleasure come from motherhood itself or because you're told it would bring pleasure?
(27) Under what circumstances would maternal employment have a positive or negative effect on children?
(28) What determines the power dynamic in a relationship?
(29) What effects do conforming to gender roles have on non-conformists?
(30) Would lower class women be neutral or equally passionate about the family and career devotion schemas?
(31) Why are laid off high-tech employees seen as villains?
(32) What role does the contemporary job search play on the unemployed worker?
(33) What is the source of the high-the workers' career optimism?
(34) Is cost cutting or loyalty more important?
(35) Why did firms a few decades ago see themselves as morally obligated to take care of workers?
(36) Are we defined by our work?
(37) Can you have job identity without stability?
(38) Is self-marketing a result of normative control?
(39) Should networking be taught in school?
(40) What role do interim positions play on workers' mental state?
(41) Is it naïve for employees to place their faith in the market?
(42) What role does self-esteem play in labor market success?
(43) How much does rising male unemployment have the potential to change gender roles / appreciation for roles?
(44) How do men and women differ in assigning blame for layoffs?

and the discussion. If you just say you are not sure, it sounds like you are not paying attention. This is especially the case if you are looking at your screen and not following the discussion with your eyes and ears.

When you ask someone to repeat a question in class, are you asking him to repeat the question or to clarify the question? If the former, be honest and say you were not paying attention. If the latter, specify what part of the question you understand and what part of the question you need clarification.

In August 2020, I sent emails to 34 former students of discussion-based classes I taught at Purdue and Cornell Universities, 25 responded. This was not a randomized group. Under pressure of time, I selected these 34 students based on my assumption that they were most likely to respond within seven days. These former students were drawn from “Introduction to Organizational Behavior – Honors” and “Managing Human Capital Globally,” both of which I taught at the Krannert School of Management at Purdue University between August 2018 and December 2019 and “Asian American Workers and the Law” taught at Cornell University between August and December 2006. Several of these students are recent graduates with fulltime employment while others are undergraduate students at Purdue University. All three courses were discussion-based in format. Data in Table 2 are unedited and appear verbatim as written by the former students. Table 2 illustrates, from the students’ perspective, the major learning outcomes of my modified Discussion Method to be: how to ask questions; how to communicate in plain English with colleagues in small groups; how to communicate in a calm and professional manner on sensitive topics; how to remain respectful of colleagues with different viewpoints; how to succeed in workplaces where meetings, not lectures, dominate; how to build lasting relationship with classmates; how to formulate cohesive arguments to reach a consensus; how to teach others; how to prepare for class; how to investigate materials beyond the scope of assigned readings; how to discuss ideas and learn from everyone in the room; how to learn from uncomfortable or previously unconsidered viewpoints; how to reconcile opposing arguments; how to navigate others’ backgrounds; how to search for answers to “Why?”; how to present your ideas succinctly and persuasively in a professional setting; and how “to troubleshoot and respond to on-the-fly inquiries to gain the confidence of more experienced co-workers.”

From the students’ perspective, discussion-based classes are superior to large lectures for the following reasons: create a safe and contained environment in which to formulate, defend and judge ideas in front of others; motivate students to complete readings in order to be a more effective contributor to collective learning and not disappoint classmates; hold students more accountable; expose students to more diversity of thought; ask important and relevant questions and in the process, build networks; demand more work from students, which in turn, enable students to store what they learned in long-term memory; mitigate fear of sharing individual opinions by building relationship among classmates; stimulates students better, allowing students to learn better by motivating them to prepare more for class; boosts students’ academic performance; enables students to remain engaged during and after class; embraces nuance; and integrates new ideas from disparate perspectives and disciplines (Table 3).

The Discussion Method: Challenges

As an immigrant student at St. John’s College, Annapolis, I often felt an inability to relate to the text, beginning in Week 1 with Homer’s *Iliad*. This alienation persisted throughout my stay at a campus known for its devotion to the great books of the Western World. SJC attracted me because I wanted to be part of a mandatory curriculum that emphasized reading and discussing texts that remain the bedrock of American ideals and institutions. I persisted through the alienation because I wanted to master the Discussion Method. For the purposes of this paper, the central focus is the Discussion Method, not the SJC reading list. To those who believe SJC to be obsolete, there are also those who view America’s third oldest college to be “the most forward-thinking future-proof college in America” (Marber 2017) and where being comfortable with ambiguity before, during, and after class is a virtue (Bruni 2018).

Table 2 Responses to “Why discussion-based classes are an important missing element in undergraduate management education”

- (1) I can firmly say that I’ve gained the most out of discussion-based classes both in and out of honors during my time at Purdue. One strong thing I feel that is missing from Krannert education are opportunities to really learn how to engage and interact with peers (in terms of communication). Case competitions and the occasional in-class presentation are great; but ultimately they are so few and far in between. In the business world, I’m constantly seeing folks that have trouble communicating their ideas in a professional environment without the use of slang/day-to-day verbiage. Ultimately fresh grads need to understand how to communicate in a calm and professional manner, especially on touchy points, as well as in a way that shows they are doing their best to remain respectful of the viewpoints and people around them. These are all skills of which I think more discussion-based courses can greatly help with.
- (2) By forcing students to take large lectures they are unable to engage with the material meaningfully. These discussion-based classes reinforce students’ ability to express their opinions and teaches them how to appropriately respond in a discussion. Even thinking ahead when students enter their career, they will be engaging in meetings not in lectures. Learning how to effectively communicate is vital for post college success.
- (3) Some people argue that a vast majority of high school students are not well prepared for colleges. I disagree. Colleges fail to deliver a pellucid connection between university culture and the social/ pop culture references that youngsters recourse. Same thing is happening around the world. However, pervasive as the concept is, it can be changed, for discussion-based classes provides relevance of particular topics in a real-world setting. After all, communication is part of human nature, meaning conversation flows both ways, as well as information.
- (4) The magnitude and rate of retention for course content is greater within a class that demands active participation and avid preparation. Years after taking this course (OBHR 33000H), I can recall discussions which help me remember greater course themes (Scientific Management, Human Relations Theory, etc.) and their details at a much greater rate than I can recall details of non-discussion-based courses (i.e. all other management classes). Also, participating in discussion allows for personal growth as well as greater focus on the current goals - something that a class where you listen or maybe take notes for the duration of the period does not have.
Also, I believe I stated during your class that discussion-based learning would not work for STEM classes like what I went through at the time. My belief has since shifted, and I can see a possibility of this being feasible - in fact it is something that I would actually like to see and believe could do all that is attempted to happen now (“weed out” (I think this term is overused/don’t like but the point is the same), prepare students for advanced degree/research, prepare for professional career).
- (5) I believe discussion-based classes teach students communication skills not required in the “traditional” classes. I learned much more than subject material, such as how to properly demonstrate an argument, listen to other opinions, truly come prepared for class, and investigate material outside of the required readings. Overall, the small size of this class allowed me to learn the material with other students, not just skim lecture notes or information from a handout. I was able to discuss ideas and learn from everyone, rather than listen to only one person give information on a topic.
- (6) Discussion based classes are an extremely important missing piece in undergraduate management courses for a couple reasons. As a freshman in college, only two of my courses were discussion based, one in the School of Management, and one in the Honors College. My discussion-based management course allowed me to build a relationship with my fellow students and professor that I could not get in a traditional lecture course setting. Daily communication with my peers and guided discussion made learning much more natural and in depth than in my non-discussion-based courses. Another reason why I feel discussion based classes are an extremely important missing piece in undergraduate management courses is that especially as a first year student, having to speak early and often in class gave me the confidence I needed to communicate with my peers and professors outside of the classroom, and it taught me how to process information and formulate my thoughts into discussion points.
- (7) Discussion-based classes allow students to learn to communicate with people of different backgrounds. This is a necessary skill that not only is a great tool in the professional world, but also is a great life skill. Some students tend to struggle in this area and this environment allows them to get pushed out of their comfort zone. This kind of environment also keeps the students more engaged in class and their course material. When it comes to large lecture halls, students don’t always tend to pay attention because the professor is speaking to hundreds and participation is not always necessary. When a discussion between students is required in order to keep the class going, students must not only be engaged in the topics being discussed, but also well-prepared on the material that the discussion material is based.
- (8) Discussion-based classes are an important missing element in undergraduate management education because real-life management first happens within small groups of people, and then translates into larger groups.

Table 2 (continued)

- Whether in large or small companies or institutions, managers have meetings with small teams in conference rooms where several discussions take place as two-way communication. Since different perspectives and opinions are exchanged, it is essential to be prepared to respect others' points of view, and to be knowledgeable in formulating cohesive arguments to reach a common agreement, which can only be acquired by practicing in discussion-based environments.
- (9) Discussion-based learning plays a major role in providing for the training needs of today's aspiring management professionals.
- By changing classes to a format that promotes group discussion and peer learning, management students get the chance to develop important interpersonal and argumentative skills that are just as, if not, more important than the technical skills.
- Through my personal experience in this type of collaborative learning environment, I understood the value in practicing sophisticated argumentative discourse. By promoting discussion in smaller settings and effectively opening a two-way communication channel, students get more involved in the learning process and a uniquely engaging learning experience, but it also helped strengthen my grasp of the concepts that we were discussing leading to an improved ability to apply concepts to the real world.
- (10) Due to the nature of Management, discussing at a meeting or conference-listening to other people's opinions and speaking my opinions, persuading others with my logic and agreeing with others-takes a lot of part at work. In this regard, in discussion-based classes, I could listen to different management students' thoughts/opinions and share my opinions on a specific topic, and I could develop the skills and ability to discuss and debate appropriately. If discussion-based classes weren't in my undergraduate program, I would've missed the opportunity to develop those skills. After graduating from (undergraduate) college, this discussion skill/ability is even more important both in a graduate school and further in management practice.
- (11) Discussion-based classes are vital to a well-rounded education in undergraduate management because they enable students to learn from a variety of viewpoints, including ones they may be uncomfortable with or may have never considered. In addition, they allow for a dynamic, team-style environment that is much more similar to the workplace than traditional lectures.
- (12) I think discussion-based classes allow for students to engage in a deeper level of learning by encouraging the students to interact with the information presented. In a large lecture students are not encouraged to absorb the information other than for exams, quizzes, and other forms of assessment – to me, this seems to contribute to cramming and then forgetting the material after the assignment. Additionally, in a course that discusses topics that can have different interpretations and opinions surrounding the content, discussion permits participants to learn of the opinions of their classmates further opening their mind to other beliefs. In a business setting this can be crucial to appealing to others' interests and motivations. Furthermore, it builds self-awareness for students, revealing that one's own beliefs are not the only way to view a topic. Personally, I absorb information more thoroughly when I have to argue it, question it, and discuss it – discussion- based courses tap into this additional way of absorbing information, supplementing other forms such as literature, lectures, and presentations.
- (13) Current undergrad courses mostly employ teacher-centered, lecture-based classes. While they're great for professors, before-class preparation and mid-class delivery is easier, it leaves students most often only memorizing content. From my experience, discussion-based classes offered more engagement with the content and applied real-world, yet personal context. Two years later, you can't ask me specific terms I learned in *Managing Human Capital*, but I can explain the difficulties within international negotiations through the eyes of an Azerbaijani carpet merchant. And I can only remember that example because of discussions I've had where I learned other students' backstories and connected those stories to examples. If it weren't for that discussion-based course, I most likely wouldn't have met half the people I'm connected to now and wouldn't have retained as much information about global dexterity, if I were in a large lecture.
- I can't assume, but I can speculate that my students in Timor-Leste preferred a discussion-based class compared to a traditional teacher-lecture class. Before they would mostly repeat whatever the teacher asked them to repeat. After, students were using their personal lives as context for making sentences and talking to classmates. After all, how could they learn to speak a language if they didn't speak in class?
- (14) As much as business is driven by data, it is also driven by the ability to effectively communicate your ideas. Discussion based classes allowed me as a student to practice the crucial skills of active listening and asking questions. They mirror business meetings in the way that every person is expected and required to be actively involved.
- (15) Specifically, discussion-based classes are important in undergraduate management education because it gives students practice in reconciling differing viewpoints and navigating others' backgrounds in a more intimate way, better preparing them to be leaders in their careers."
- (16) Discussion-based classes are such an essential missing element from university management education. When students discuss the content of the class and are dissecting it, they begin to understand the material

Table 2 (continued)

- deeply because the discussion fosters finding the answer to the question “Why?”. It also promotes healthy debate and understanding different perspectives while exposing students to the idea that one can agree to disagree, therefore creating adults that can work together and respect one another’s opinion.
- (17) When you have a smaller class and focus on discussion, students are more likely to pay attention and participate driving up the likelihood that they could score better in the class and become well-round adults going forward. Management in particular is more grey than other fields because management will always be subjective while the others are strictly scientific and mathematic. When you have such a subjective and grey topic, the opinion of one will never spur change or new ideas whereas discussion allows all different thoughts from all different peoples from all different backgrounds to find a new approach, strategy, practice, etc.
- (18) I think classes that are discussion-based allow us to learn more by diving deeper into the material. By being able to talk to others and see from different perspectives.
- (19) Discussion-based classes are often neglected in large universities when there are typically larger classes sizes to meet the demand. In an undergraduate management education I think it is important to learn the value of participation and suggesting your own ideas. When looking at the industry, there are very few management roles where you do not provide your own insights or opinions, often you are responsible for some form of decision making. Without the experience of voluntarily participating in discussion, students may not be prepared for contributing in their future role where it is a necessity and they need to know how to receive opinions that disagree with theirs in a constructive way.
- (20) Most students go their entire academic careers without ever having the opportunity to voice their own opinions, let alone defend their opinions. In discussion-based classes, students receive the rare chance to develop both their verbal adaptability and the quality of the ideas that they will operate off of in their field of choice. This fills the ‘critical thinking’ gap that exists in most lecture-based curriculum as students are forced to defend their own ideas with logic and evidence from questions from their peers.
- (21) Discussion-based classes are an important, missing part of higher education because they allow the students to more fully immerse themselves in their learning. Discussion based classes allow students to be more attentive. Rather than just listening to a professor lecture at students for an hour, students can interact with one another. This not only allows students to become more involved in the class, but learn the material in a more effective manner.
- (22) Discussion-based classes are highly valuable as they help students develop presentation skills that will prepare them for a professional setting where it is critical to present your ideas clearly, succinctly and persuasively. These skills are not developed in a large lecture setting where students rarely engage directly with professors and other students in consistent dialogue. Discussion-based classes also motivate students to prepare more rigorously for each class given the expectation that they will be asked by the professor to actively share their ideas and engage their classmates in healthy discourse. In a lecture setting students are more apt to fall behind on reading assignments before class given there is no immediate ability for a professor or peers to discern whether a student is unprepared. As discussions evolve between students and a professor in discussion-based courses, students are pushed to think on their feet more quickly and respond intelligently as new questions are posed or perspectives are shared that had not been previously considered. The ability to troubleshoot and respond to on the fly inquiries is an important skill new graduates need to hone to succeed in the workplace and gain the confidence of their more experienced co-workers.

Until business schools offer full institutional support of the Discussion Method and apply it throughout a curriculum that integrates business, liberal arts, and sciences, it would be difficult for individual faculty members to sustain this paradigm shift on their own. Alternatively, collaboration between business and liberal arts colleges within the same university can yield fruitful results that include co-designed, co-taught interdisciplinary courses that embody Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s recommendations. That is, the key to an integrated curriculum is institutional intentionality. This integrated curriculum can only be achieved when institutions wholeheartedly support faculty members to leave the safety of their area of expertise and teach courses that integrate business, the liberal arts, and sciences. Until then, students’ learning experiences, along with their problem-solving abilities, will continue to be disintegrated (Colby et al. 2011 pp. x-xi). Perhaps the integrated teaching and learning advocated by the Carnegie Foundation can only be realized when the existing siloed university structure itself is integrated. Any integrated collaboration must consider ways to

Table 3 Responses to “Why discussion-based classes are superior to large lectures”

- (23) I think discussion-based courses are superior to larger lectures purely because of the more intimate relationships you are able to develop with your fellow classmates and professors. Traditionally lecture based courses are filled with hundreds of students, and the professor doesn't even know your name, and the students probably don't even know the names of their peers sitting in front of and behind them. A discussion-based course allows you the opportunity if you take it to build relationships with your classmates and peers that persist outside of the classroom.
- (24) I studied engineering, not management, so I can't speak specifically to why discussion-based classes are important for an undergraduate management education but I can still talk about my experiences. I always felt more engaged in discussion-based classes than in large lectures because I knew I was a part of the learning, not just a passive observer trying to soak in knowledge. This also motivated me stay on track with readings and to read them more thoroughly so that I could more effectively participate in class. Whenever I would miss a reading, I would feel unable to contribute, as if I had let the class down and this motivated me to stay on top of my own learning. I also think that it is valuable to see how different people think differently on the route to whatever conclusions they are drawing in discussion-based classes. Most classes I took in college emphasized the existence of correct answers and methods of reaching them, but that's often not the case in real life. I think it's valuable to have some exposure to talking out complex problems that don't have a real solution and then having to discuss how other people may have viewed and solved the problem in ways separate from your own. This approach develops critical thinking instead of just memorization and application of rules.
- (25) As an introvert, I tend to avoid raising my hand in most traditional lectures because it feels unnecessary and somewhat disruptive. However, in discussion-based lectures, which depend on student participation, I feel empowered to ask questions and share my thoughts. Also, due to the active learning component of discussion-based lectures, I find that I remember much more of the material that I learn in discussion-based lectures as opposed to traditional lectures.
- (26) Large lectures do little in the way of offering students the chance to refine essential interpersonal skills.
- (27) Allowing student to participate in discussions gives them a chance not only to be an active participant in their learning but also to be in charge of their learning. Students have to come prepared to class to participate in the discussions. This holds them more accountable for out of class work than it would in a large lecture style class. I found a discussion-based class challenged my thinking a lot more than a lecture-based class. In the discussion we would hear from everyone in the class, what they thought, things they would draw from their backgrounds to contribute, and different interpretations of the reading material. It is a lot more eye opening and introduces you to more diversity of thought than you would get hearing from one professor in a lecture.
- (28) Discussion-based classes have a way of not only building stronger relationships with your peers, but also opening doors to hearing from multiple perspectives. We really get the chance to spend our discussion time in topics that interest us and we really get to explore everything we want to about it. This is only possible in smaller groups! I've had a small share of discussion-based classes at Purdue and I really have walked away from those classes having learned much more than traditional lecture style classes. There is just so much more to take away! Instead of sitting for an hour listening to a professor talk about a topic and go through a set of slides, we really get the chance to delve into those topics in our discussion and leave class having come to a new realization. At the same time, we are also practicing skills that are important in the real world such as, professional discussions, asking important and relevant questions, and building our networks through peer relationships.
- (29) Discussion-based classes allow the individual to have the opportunity to form their own thoughts and opinions on topics while also getting insight from other viewpoints. They also allow feedback from both peers and professors in a more intimate setting.
- (30) I believe that discussion-based classes forces students to understand the material for themselves. By discussing the topic they are able to formulate their own opinions and it acts as a form of teaching to the other students, thus reinforcing the material. Lectures do not have this capability because it is a passive interaction with the material.
- (31) In direct comparison to larger lectures, there are a couple glaring observations that I personally can make. The first one being I didn't go to the large lectures (unless forced by graded attendance, etc.) because I do not learn best this way. I learn better by actively engaging with material, and I accomplish this best by taking a course that is discussion-based (hard to find) or reading and working problems/theory on my own or with others. Secondly, I viewed the larger lectures as more of a burden due to the attempt of teaching by assigning various homework, quizzes, etc.; whereas, the discussion-based class had 3 assignments for the entire course but required preparation to participate well within class. In my experience, more time was spent working outside of class for the larger lecture style classes than the course that made us prepare before every meeting, and ultimately I am able to recall more of the material from discussion-based classes vs. non-discussion-based

Table 3 (continued)

- classes today. Due to this, I would like to claim that discussion-based classes are more efficient than their larger lecture style counterparts.
- (32) Large lecture management classes are no better than in-person PowerPoints. Students can read at home. Discussion based classes are better in that students can apply what they're learning through discussions that offer real-world context.
- (33) Discussion-based classes are superior to larger lectures because they simulate a real-world environment. This is to say, it allows for participants to formulate, defend, and judge ideas in front of others, creating the space to learn from dynamic interactions in a safe and contained environment. The best example to portray the difference between both lecture modalities would be learning how to drive. Imagine a situation where a person had two options to learn how to drive, the first being watching someone doing it, and the second being actually sitting in the car, turning it on, and driving forward in a safe road where there are no cars, obstacles, or pedestrians. Evidently, the person that has had practical training would be much more suitable to take the wheel in case of an emergency compared to someone who has merely seen how to drive.
- (34) When comparing to large lectures, discussion-based courses allow for students to build a relationship among each other helping to mitigate the fear of sharing their opinion or verbally engaging in a large lecture. Not only that, but a smaller, discussion-based course allows for more time for students to share their interpretations of the material and contribute their ideas and experiences.
- (35) Learning to work with others and discuss ideas openly within the classroom enabled me to diversify my understanding of varying issues. This would not have been possible in a large, lecture-style class. Based on my experience, I could better actively participate in the discussion-based class than in the large lectures, and therefore I could be more stimulated and learn better. For example, to better discuss in the class on a given topic, I had to prepare more for the class and understand fully on a given topic. Even though when I didn't get to the point before the class, I could catch up in the class while discussing with a lecturer and other students. This naturally boosted my academic achievement.
- (36) Whereas, in a large lecture, students are swallowed up by the lack of enthusiasm from their peers and disengaged by a lengthy and boring PowerPoint. Discussion based classes instead encourage engagement by requiring the students to be more involved in their education.
- (37) When classes are in large lectures, not only does that encourage lazier students to sit in the back and not pay attention but you end up only hearing one opinion- the lecturer's. It's difficult to have discussions in such large groups, much less engage students that are there for the attendance points. Teaching students in a large lecture hall where one voice is heard enlarges the gap between each great new idea that leads to great change.
- (38) Discussion-based classes are superior to large lectures because discussion-based learning provides students the opportunity to form their own opinions as well as have their opinions challenged. It's easy to go to class, sit and take notes, review them and then take an exam but then quickly forget the material. This often happens in large lectures where it's easy to be distracted when you're one of hundreds. I have found that students will remain engaged during and after the class when they were participating in a lively discussion going back and forth with other students. It then translates into longer retention of material.
- (39) Lecture based classes forfeit any type of nuance, they regularly operate as a glorified list of facts which students are meant to memorize and regurgitate. Discussion based classes are inherently flexible and designed to be different each time, this results in an environment where new ideas are produced and integrated into course material from disparate perspectives and disciplines. By directly interacting with the course material, students gain a much greater appreciation for the ideas they are exposed to in their classes. Professors can't actually know if the students understand the core idea they're trying to convey, they have to wait for exams where students regurgitate the same words and terminology that they saw their professors use instead of sharing their own understanding of the topic.
- (40) A class that is entirely reliant on lectures can be repetitive, exhausting and non-engaging. Where a discussion-based class is engaging, a better learning environment and more interactive for both the students and professors.
- (41) An undergraduate management education aims to prepare a graduate to successfully enter the business world. I believe a discussion-based course better simulates the workplace versus a large lecture format which relies often on multiple choice exams and spoon-feeding information to students which is inconsistent with the demands of a professional setting.

reconcile the varying cost structures between business schools and potential partners within the university. If done correctly, instructors can model the mindset and problem-solving

methodologies that are the very learning outcomes students can expect from such courses. These outcomes are the four central dimensions of liberal learning: Analytical Thinking, Multiple Framing, the Reflective Exploration of Meaning, and Practical Reasoning (Colby et al. 2011 pp. 59–69). As an alternative, instructional faculty, whose presence is becoming more common in research universities, can be hired to specialize in the Discussion Method infused into a business education that integrates liberal arts and sciences.

Conclusion

It may seem odd to be touting the virtues of a discussion-based business pedagogy anchored by the liberal arts and sciences when small, residential colleges that embody the same philosophy are on the wane. A discussion-based business pedagogy anchored by the liberal arts and sciences leads to the following eight major learning outcomes: (1) how to reconcile opposing arguments; (2) how to think on one's own two feet; (3) how to formulate cohesive arguments to reach a consensus; (4) how to mitigate fear of sharing individual opinions by building relationship among classmates; (5) how to allow students to learn better by motivating them to prepare more for class; (6) how to enable students to remain engaged during and after class; (7) how to embraces nuance; and (8) how to integrate new ideas from disparate perspectives and disciplines. By linking individual learning to collective learning, discussion-based classes teach interdependence to achieve collective and individual benefits. Discussion-based learning is the original team-based learning. Put differently, discussion-based classes are “procedural and participatory,” because this pedagogy promotes human dignity and holds that learning outcomes depend on the responsibility of every student in the classroom (Dierksmeier 2016).

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