



The Value of Liberal Arts: Myths, Realities, and Why It Matters

A guide for high school counselors — presented by Erasmus University
College, University College Utrecht, Baylor University & KC360 (IEC) ·
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What do you think of when you hear Liberal Arts School?

What Is a Liberal Arts Education?

An education built around **breadth** across humanities, sciences, and social sciences — with small classes, high faculty contact, and an emphasis on critical thinking, writing, and synthesis across disciplines. The opposite of early, narrow specialization.

Interdisciplinarity

Students combine multiple fields of study

Small-Group Instruction

Close mentorship and faculty access

Thinkers, Not Just Credential-Holders

Developing adaptable, analytical minds



Two Models, One Philosophy

U.S. Model — Baylor University

Large residential university with a liberal-arts-and-sciences core curriculum. Wide range of majors, shared foundational core, strong faculty-student relationships, and a robust graduate/professional school pipeline.

Dutch Model — EUC & UCU

Selective, English-taught honors colleges inside larger research universities (Erasmus & Utrecht). 3-year bachelor's, fully interdisciplinary by design — students combine social science, humanities, science, and law/economics in a small cohort.

- Both models share interdisciplinarity, small-group instruction, and close mentorship — they differ in degree length, cost structure, and the broader higher-ed system (Bologna EU vs. U.S.).

Busting the Myths

✗ "Unemployable graduates"

AAC&U/Burning Glass data shows liberal arts grads close the earnings gap with pre-professional peers by their late 20s–30s and **outpace them in leadership roles**. Liberal arts is optimized for a 40-year career, not a first internship.

✗ "Only humanities — no science or math"

Liberal arts refers to a **breadth model**, not a subject list. It includes math, natural sciences, and social sciences. Many programs have strong STEM placement into med school, PhD programs, and tech.

✗ "Less rigorous"

Liberal arts curricula are often **more demanding in breadth** — multiple disciplines, writing-intensive, thesis/capstone work. Rigor and specialization are different axes; one is not a downgrade of the other.

More Myths — Busted



❌ "American-centric, doesn't translate internationally"

Liberal arts & sciences colleges have grown significantly across Europe — Netherlands, UK, Germany, Finland — over the last 20 years. EUC and UCU are prime examples. The model exists on **both sides of the Atlantic**.

❌ "The expensive, inefficient path"

A 3-year European LAS bachelor's can be materially **cheaper and faster** than a 4-year U.S. degree. Merit aid at U.S. liberal arts colleges also changes the calculus. Scholarships in Europe are rare and typically small. Evaluate per-institution, not by category.

The Real Value: Skills That Last

Employers consistently rank these competencies highest — and liberal arts programs are built to develop them (AAC&U/NACE employer survey data):



Critical Thinking



Written & Verbal
Communication



Problem-Solving

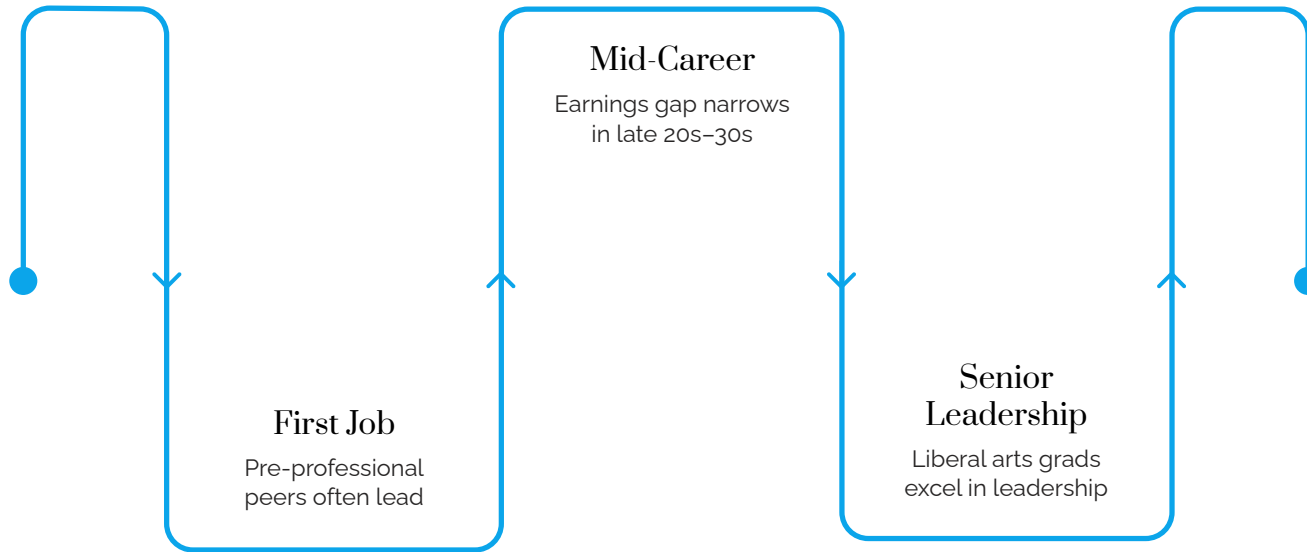


Ethical Reasoning



Adaptability

Future-Proofing Your Students



Long-Arc Advantages

- **Graduate & professional school pipeline:** Strong preparation for law, medicine, business, and PhD programs — depth of thinking matters more than major
- **AI & automation resilience:** Breadth and adaptability are the differentiator when narrow technical skills can be automated or become outdated
- **Global & cross-cultural fluency:** Especially valuable for internationally mobile students already ahead on adaptability

Practical Takeaways for Counselors



Reframe the Conversation

Shift from "what will you major in?" to "**what kind of thinker do you want to become?**" — liberal arts is a strategy, not an absence of one.



Assess Student Fit

Ask: Do they enjoy connecting ideas across subjects? Are they curious but undecided? Do they want optionality before specializing? A student seeking early narrow/technical training may be better served elsewhere.



Present European Options

For globally mobile families, actively present EUC and UCU alongside U.S. options — comparable quality, often faster and cheaper, and counselors frequently default to U.S.-only without realizing alternatives exist.



Evaluate Value Per-Institution

Factor in merit aid, cost of living, and degree length. Don't assume "liberal arts" is inherently premium-priced — the calculus varies widely by school and country.

Let's Talk

Liberal arts isn't one country's model — it's a **global, adaptable approach to education**. Counselors are well-positioned to present it accurately rather than let outdated myths do the talking.

💬 What questions do you have?

🤔 What objections are you hearing most from families?



Contact Us & Resources

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Key Data Sources

- AAC&U "How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment"
- NACE Job Outlook employer skills survey
- Erasmus University College & University College Utrecht official program data
- Baylor University core curriculum and outcomes data
- universitycollege.nl — overview of all Dutch university colleges offering LAS

