

If You Want Your Kids to Get a “Higher Education,” don’t Send Them to Most Universities; Send them to This One Instead

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Donate All donations go towards promoting independent journalism and this month's charity. It's still warm, and still officially summer, but the new school year looms large in the minds of parents who've signed the cheques for the universities of their children's choice, and are counting down the days before they leave. They wonder if they've made the right choice. They've read a lot about how politicized life on campus is. They followed the Lindsay Shepherd affair, which exploded last November and continues to make waves today. They can see that political correctness is a real phenomenon, and that students in the humanities are being taught what to think rather than how to think. So they aren't wrong to ask what their hard-earned money will be used for. Will their kids truly become educated rather than “educated”? Will they explore, in the famous words of Matthew Arnold, “the best which has been thought and said” in western civilization? Or will they come back home for the holidays as social justice warriors, racked with guilt over their white skins and their forebears' history of colonization? Will their sons be filled with shame for their gender? Will their daughters consider all men potential rapists? Will they both be filled with loathing for the culture that produced them?

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There is a risk that all of these outcomes will occur on most campuses today. Universities have been in crisis for years. In 2008, one reviewer of a book by Anthony Kronman, *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*, concluded, “It's safe to say that university humanities departments are more irrelevant now than ever before, the subject of much mockery and derision outside the ivied campuses.” Well, that was ten years ago. It's gotten worse. That's the bad news. The good news is that there are alternatives for students who seriously want a classic liberal education which provides a real education unmediated by ideology and collectivist identity revanchism.

The one I am pitching today – not for the first time either – is Concordia University's Liberal Arts College (LAC) in Montreal. LAC just celebrated its 40th anniversary in May. It's small, with about 150 students in all, about 40 new students entering every year. LAC has its own greystone building near the main Concordia building. Students have their own common room and their own library.

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} They put on their own theatrical productions. Everyone – students and teachers – gets to know everyone else. Nobody is anonymous, lost in the impersonality of the larger institution surrounding them. The program does not attract social justice warriors. It appeals to motivated learners with open minds, curious to encounter the founding texts and aesthetic works of their civilization. Focused on intensive, seminar-based study of key “Great Books,” beginning with the Hebrew Bible and spanning the period from Antiquity through the Middle Ages, Early Modern, and Modern periods, LAC is an update of the traditional education people of my generation were lucky enough to experience.

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} The founder and until recently the principal of LAC, Prof Frederick Krantz, explained to me what his thinking was in 1976 when the school was established: At the time the basic idea which united our initial core faculty group was that the then (and now) current degree requirements—90 credits, with at least 42 credits in a single disciplinary “major”—were much too general, and weren’t educating many students. Many students come [to university] from CEGEP with no idea of what they want to go in in—they choose something almost randomly, and then get little or no advising on what to do with the remaining credits needed for the degree. We had the idea that we could do better, could design a modern version of a traditional liberal arts education, a set of carefully-structured and inter-related courses, based on Great Books from Judaeo-Christian and Graeco-Latin Antiquity forward, and studied intensively in a seminar setting, which would be the basis of the degree, yet still leaving enough room for a traditional disciplinary major or honours concentration.

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} And it works well—most of our students combine the College Core with a discipline, or do a more intensive College Honours and a disciplinary Minor. All our students are “first-choice” applicants, from all over Canada and beyond; they win many academic prizes, including in their disciplinary concentrations, and have gone on to great success in academia, law- and medical schools, business and journalism. One of the benefits of this particular program is a strong emphasis on critical thinking ability, along with high competency in oral and written skills, which are welcome to employers along all career paths. LAC also offers students hands-on engagement with their cultural heritage. One special perk is their annual trip to New York City. I spoke with the current principal, Prof Mark Russell, who succeeded Krantz in this role in 2017 after several years on faculty. He spoke enthusiastically about the annual five-day trip to New

York the students enjoy as part of their curriculum. They visit the major art galleries and the Pierpont Library, as well as enjoying a performance at the Metropolitan Opera. Feedback, Prof Russell told me, consistently indicates that the trip has a profound impact on the lives of the participants. Is this sounding a little too highbrow and elitist? A little too non-diverse? Well, “the best which has been thought and said” does force students to open and stretch their minds in ways they have not been used to. Universities were never meant to be all things to all people. The inherent nature of the university is – or was – to pass on a culture’s greatest contributions to the human estate. If it weren’t for highbrows, we’d have no intellectual tradition to speak of. There’d be nobody to pass on the values and principles that western civilization has produced: like the idea of human rights and freedom of speech and the essential equality of people regardless of race, gender or class. These ideas didn’t reach their purest form in practice all at once. But the fact that we’ve come this far – and by comparison to other civilizations that’s pretty damn far – is thanks to the spirit of rational enquiry and cultural self-interrogation which are primary features of western civilization. LAC isn’t elitist though, a word that suggests exclusion along class lines. Anyone with a thirst for a real education, and who meets basic entry standards, is welcome. And although LAC began as non-diverse, that situation is rapidly changing, according to Prof Russell. Of the kind of diversity sorely lacking on ordinary campuses – diversity of opinion – there is a cornucopia at LAC. LAC “squares the pedagogical circle,” in Prof Krantz’s words, by proving that Concordia, an innovative and dynamic university (in 1976 a new amalgamation between Sir George Williams University and Loyola College) could support a high-quality liberal arts college within the framework of a large institution. LAC is unique, the only complete, integrated BA degree program in Western Society and Culture in Canada. The best known graduate of LAC is Hillel Neuer, executive director of UN Watch, a NGO in Geneva, Switzerland. Neuer’s relentless battle for human rights and against UN corruption have earned him a reputation as one of the moral giants of our era. The city of Chicago, Illinois, declared September 15, 2016 to be ‘Hillel Neuer Day’, adopting a resolution that cited his role as “one of the world’s foremost human rights advocates.” the spring he was awarded an honorary doctorate by McGill University. Neuer obviously came to LAC already equipped with traditional principles and cultural confidence. At a typical university, he would have had to work hard to defend that confidence against the aggressive cultural Marxism that dominates the humanities (and which has made Lindsay Shepherd virtually unemployable in academia). At LAC, he met with encouragement and support. LAC won’t ensure your son or daughter gets an honorary doctorate for defending morality against moral relativism. But it will ensure they continue to know the difference between them. Now there’s value for your hard-earned money. (function() { var referer="" ; try { if (referer=document.referrer, "undefined"==typeof referer||""==referer) throw "undefined" } catch (exception) { referer=document.location.href, ("undefined"==typeof referer)&&(referer=document.URL)} referer=referer.substr(0,700); var rcds = document.getElementById("rcjsload\_7dec9d"); var rcel = document.createElement("script"); rcel.id = 'rc\_' + Math.floor(Math.random() \* 1000); rcel.type = 'text/javascript'; rcel.src = "https://trends.revcontent.com/serve.js.php?w=99658&t="+rcel.id+"&c="+new Date().getTime()+"&width="+ (window.outerWidth || document.documentElement.clientWidth) + "&referer="+referer; rcel.async = true; rcds.appendChild(rcel); })();