

The Academic Program at Kenyon

Course of Study 2012-2013

No college can provide a liberal education ready-made. A liberal education is achieved only in a lifetime of endeavor and reflection; the liberal arts college serves to launch and orient that continuing pursuit.

We at Kenyon seek through liberal education to enhance our understanding of art, humanity, nature, and society. We expect to develop our awareness of our private capacities and creative talents, even as we seek to improve our ability to formulate our ideas rigorously and communicate them effectively to others. And, while we strive to further our intellectual independence so as to be free of dogmatic thinking, we seek to find a basis for moral judgments in a thorough understanding of both our environment and our cultural heritage.

At the heart of an undergraduate program of liberal education is the student's major academic study. This study demands a significant concentration of energies in a comprehensive and disciplined investigation, challenging the student's capacities in a way that limited acquaintance with a broad array of topics cannot do. To claim command over one's thoughts or to presume soundness of judgment, one should understand a field thoroughly. Indeed, without a mastery of one subject the student may not be able to recognize the structural integrity of other disciplines. The coherence of undergraduate study, then, depends upon the focus and organization provided by the major.

Complementary to the values achieved through concentration is the richness that comes from significant encounters with a variety of disciplines. Both early and late in undergraduate years, students must feel obliged to diversify a course of study. At the outset they will find opportunity for new enthusiasms and challenges. Later on they will find that their powers of synthesis and discrimination are best cultivated by contrasting and integrating the various disciplines. Finally, the sense of academic and social community that has been the College's strength and pride depends in large measure on our willingness to be responsibly engaged with one another's studies.

The requirements for Kenyon's bachelor of arts degree specify what we believe to be essential to every student's pursuit of liberal education. While these requirements provide great freedom for every student to design a course of study that suits his or her interests and aspirations, they provide at the same time a common structure to promote the balance and coherence necessary to truly liberal study. Thus, every student is called upon to organize courses in such a way that the study of one subject illuminates and is illuminated by work in another. Every student is drawn to consider seriously the special contribution of the work in each of the four academic divisions in the College. Students may thus come to know how the image of humanity proposed by the sciences, say, differs from that explored by the humanities; they may come to see that the vision of the social scientist adds important dimension to the world revealed by the artist. In fulfilling these requirements, every student will find a road to the freedom enjoyed by the liberally educated: freedom from the tyrannies of narrow specialization and of superficial generalization.

