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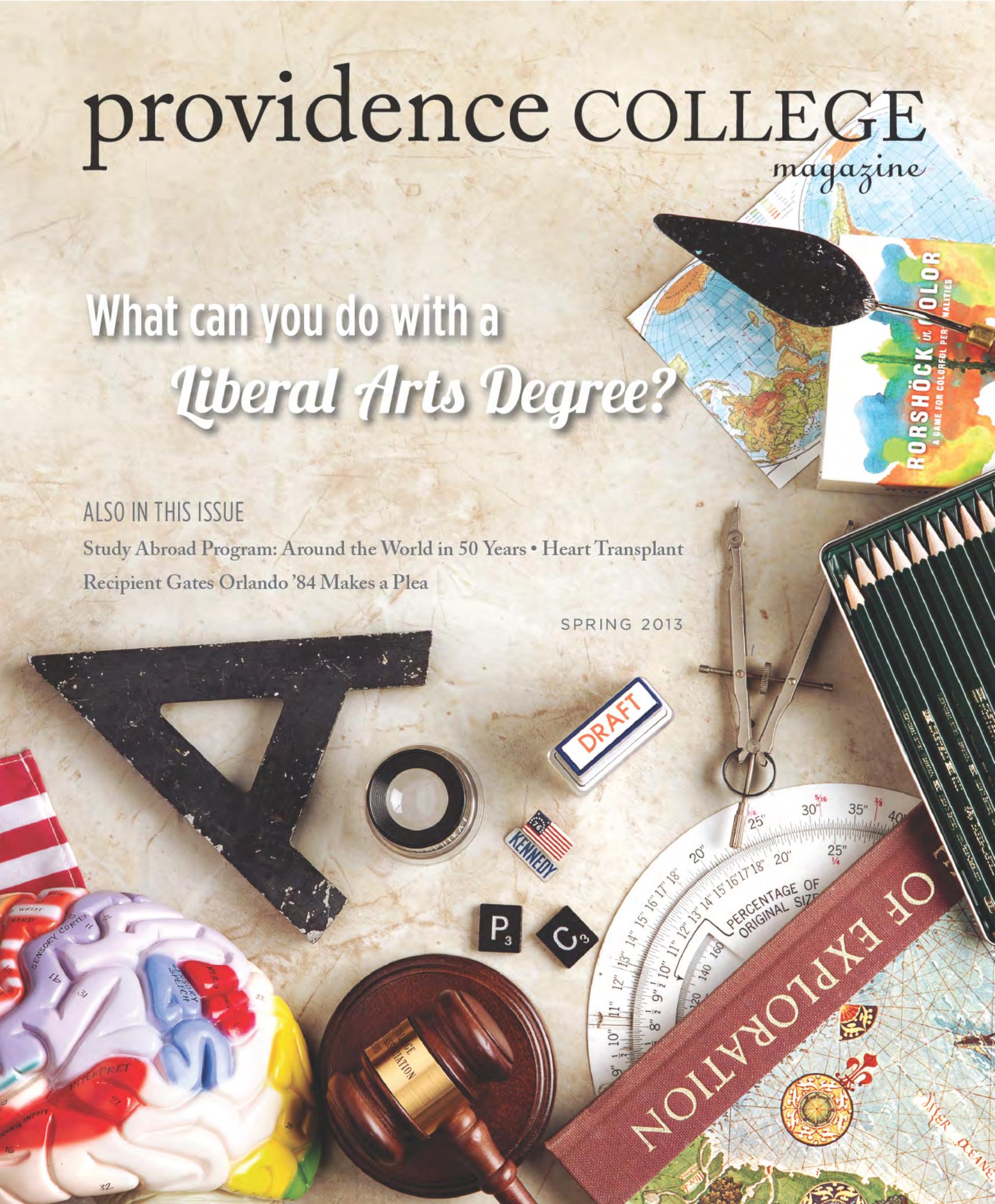
magazine

What can you do with a *Liberal Arts Degree?*

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SPRING 2013



WHAT
CAN YOU DO WITH A

Liberal Arts Degree?



In a world of specialized technology and employment, is there value in a liberal arts education?

Five alumni featured on the following pages have used degrees in art history, English, mathematics, political science, and psychology to develop successful careers while demonstrating leadership, passion, and a concern for the world around them and at large.

“Students obtain some very practical benefits from a liberal arts education,” said Dr. Sheila Adamus Liotta, dean of the School of Arts & Sciences. “As students study the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and fine arts, they are also preparing to join the workforce and become contributing members of society in very tangible ways.”

The College’s revamped Career Education Center helps students showcase and market their skills before graduation. (See story, Page 22).

In an essay on pages 6 and 7, Dr. Vance G. Morgan, professor of philosophy and director of the Development of Western Civilization Program, explains the enduring value of a liberal arts degree.

Front, from left: Robert J. Salerno '02 and Marcus K. Dowling '00; rear: Mary Stanford Wohlgenuth '83, Stephen Forneris '90, and Meghan K. Welsh '06 (Photography by Justin James Muir)



The Right Question



BY VANCE G. MORGAN, PH.D.

Professor of Philosophy

Director, Development of Western Civilization Program



Several years ago during my four-year stint as chair of the Providence College Department of Philosophy, I found myself sitting at a table with several very concerned parents. It was during one of the summer orientation sessions for incoming freshmen, and these were the parents of students who had indicated interest in majoring in philosophy once their college career began in the fall.

The question all of these parents wanted an answer to, expressed in various ways, was: “What on earth will my son/daughter be able to do with a major in philosophy?” This is a discipline-specific version of a broader, equally challenging question: “What can one do with a liberal arts education?” The answer I gave those worried parents also serves as the best answer to the second, broader question. My answer is: “You are asking the wrong question.”

In a world focused on the bottom line, a world in which we demand tangible and verifiable returns on our investments, wondering about what the real-world return will be on an investment involving the commitment of many thousands of dollars and hours makes sense. But in the world of education, particularly a liberal arts education, something of far greater importance and magnitude than the bottom line is at stake. Almost 2,500 years

ago, Aristotle provided the framework for the shift in focus I have in mind. In his moral philosophy, Aristotle argues that all persons ultimately want the same thing — to live a life of human flourishing, a life in which one’s best human potentials are actualized. The question is, what is the best way to think about living such a life? The best question to ask, Aristotle suggests, is not “What do I need to do?” if I want to live such a life? Rather, the correct question to ask is: “What sort of person should I be?” The life of human flourishing depends far more on the sort of person one is than on what one is doing and is more a matter of continual character development than of supply and demand. Bringing Aristotle’s insight to the issue of liberal arts education, the best question to ask is not “What can I do with a liberal arts education?”, but rather, “What sort of person will a liberal arts education help me become?”

My father, an itinerant Baptist minister, once told me about a plaque on the preacher’s side of the pulpit in one of the many churches in which he sermonized during my growing-up years. The plaque challenged the person giving the sermon directly by asking, “What are you trying to do to these people?” This very question has been the dominant issue underlying the Core Curriculum reform discussion that has involved all constituencies at all levels of Providence College for the past several years. During the early years of debate, then the many months of planning and strategizing after passage of the curriculum, and now the early months of actually implementing the new

The life of human flourishing depends far more on the SORT OF PERSON ONE IS than on what one is doing ...

core, we keep asking ourselves: “What are we trying to do to these people, these students who have chosen, along with their families, to make a Providence College liberal arts education a central part of their plans for a flourishing future?”

I recall being part of a meeting, several months ago, with College Provost Hugh Lena and Dean Sheila Adamus Liotta of the School of Arts & Sciences in which we were discussing how to best speak effectively and clearly about the new curriculum both on and off campus. After a fruitful conversation, we agreed to think about it further and share our ideas by email. A couple of days later, I received an email from the provost with the following: “A Providence College education prepares a student to be someone, more than to do something. It prepares students to hear more when they listen, reach deeper when they think, and say more when they speak.” Aristotle himself could not have said it better. A liberal arts education helps a student first identify, then become skilled, using the tools of lifetime learning. These tools are indispensable in the life of human flourishing and are centrally essential to a life of character, meaning, and purpose long after graduation. A liberal arts education is truly on-the-job training, not for a specific job or profession, but for a well-lived human life.

The opening lines of the “General Rationale” for the new Providence College Core Curriculum capture this energy and focus clearly:

Providence College remains committed to the importance of a liberal education as preparation for life. The subjects that students study as undergraduates and, as importantly, the skills and habits of mind they acquire in the process, shape the lives they will lead after they leave college.

The lifelong learning tools of deep reading, critical thinking, effective writing, and clear communication skills — just to name a few — are more directly transferable to “real life” after college than any collection of facts and data.

Perhaps the most important component of a liberal arts education depends strongly on the close connection between teacher and learner. The challenge is expressed well by the 20th-century French philosopher, theologian, social activist, and mystic Simone Weil:

Contrary to the usual belief, [will power] has practically no place in study. The intelligence can only be led by desire. For there to be desire, there must be pleasure and joy in the work. The intelligence only grows and bears fruit in joy. The joy of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is in running.

The desire to learn, to pursue the truth at all costs, cannot be taught. It can only be awakened by example, shown as a living reality. The greatest task of a teacher is to demonstrate, by her or his own example, the desirability and attraction, the unparalleled invigoration and joy, of being a lifetime learner and pursuer of truth. As we on campus watch the Ruane Center for the Humanities take shape before our eyes on a daily basis, our greatest desire is that it be a dynamic laboratory for the cultivation of learning, the nurturing of growth, and the shaping of character in those students we are privileged to welcome for a short time, then send into the world as ambassadors of human flourishing. ■

The Right Path



What do the liberal arts have to do with real life? Everything. At PC, students don't just learn philosophy and theology and history. They learn how to think, how to decide, how to make a life — which prepares them to make a living, whatever path they choose.

Writer Vicki-Ann Downing profiles five Providence College alumni — all educated in the liberal arts — to discover where that path has taken them.

By VICKI-ANN DOWNING

A professional portrait of Mary Stanford Wohlgemuth, a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a dark blazer over a patterned scarf and a necklace. She is sitting on a wooden block with her hands clasped. The background is a dark, textured wall.

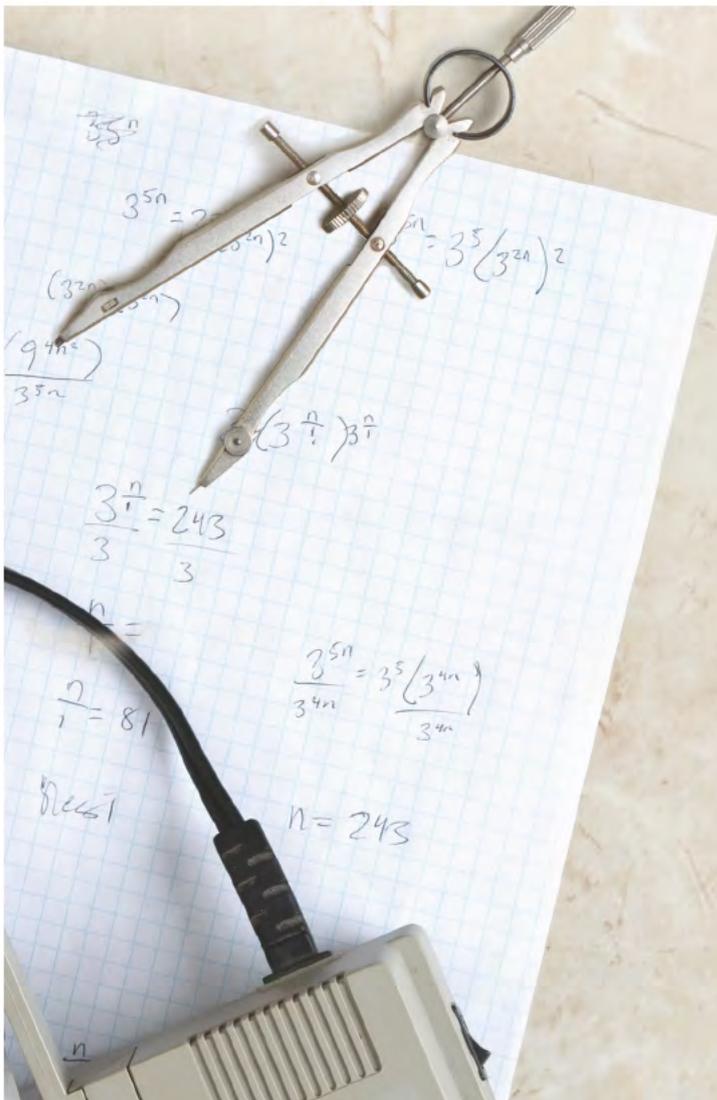
1983
MARY STANFORD WOHLGEMUTH

• MATHEMATICS •

KEEPS WARFARE CENTER FUNCTIONING AT PEAK CAPACITY

From her oceanside office high atop the Naval Undersea Warfare Center in Newport, R.I., Mary Stanford Wohlgemuth '83 oversees a \$1.1 billion budget and more than 5,000 employees.

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She is the first woman to be technical director of the warfare center. Her rank — senior executive service — is the highest a civilian can achieve in the Navy, the equivalent of admiral.

Every day, 2,752 civilian workers, most of them scientists and engineers, and 2,657 private contractors work together to design, construct, and test submarines and their parts — sonar, combat systems, torpedoes, periscopes, and launchers — for the Navy.

For Wohlgemuth, a mathematics major, it all makes sense. She liked math because she liked to solve problems. That's what she does for the Navy.

Once, during a test, when a torpedo did not perform as expected, Wohlgemuth dug into the specifications — substantial documents listing the algorithms and logic strings by which the torpedo functioned — to analyze what was wrong.

Confronted with a problem, “I don’t stop until I figure it out,” she said.

Her career passion began 30 years ago in the basement of Phillips Memorial Library, where Wohlgemuth and fellow math and computer science pioneers toiled before machines that read punch cards in languages such as ASSEMBLER and FORTRAN.

She joined the Naval Undersea Warfare Center two months after graduation. The courses taught by her professors, especially Dr. Clement DeMayo, Francis P. Ford, and Dr. James J. Tattersall, prepared her for the ongoing transition from analog to digital technology, and her experience at PC taught her how to respond to people.



"It's about sharing and caring," Wohlgemuth said. "You can't build this complex without sharing knowledge and caring for the people who use it."

At PC, "classes were small. The professors provided focused attention and encouraged us to think beyond the classroom. The morals you got from your family were reinforced and taken to the next level. The balance was nurtured."

Wohlgemuth worked all over the country for the Navy, learning everything she could about systems and their users, on ships and submarines. She spent time in Keyport, Wash.; Charleston, S.C.; and at the Pentagon and Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. With a master's degree in public administration, she served as corporate business executive for all warfare centers, which employ 18,000 people across 10 major divisions nationally.

She also found time to have two sons, now 17 and 20. To young women pursuing careers, she stresses the importance of having a family.

"Tucked away on Aquidneck Island, this place is the best-kept secret," said Wohlgemuth. "To do everything we do, and deliver quality products to the fleet, we have scientists and engineers. Some work in the labs modeling and dreaming up ideas, others take the dreams and design prototypes, still others integrate the design and make it real for the end-user.

"The people I work with are brilliant. I'm thrilled and honored to be in this position." ■





2002

ROBERT J. SALERNO

• PSYCHOLOGY •

SERVES AS A GLOBAL HEALTH CONSULTANT IN 14 COUNTRIES

In the decade since graduation, Robert J. Salerno's degree in psychology has taken him to more than a dozen countries in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. He spent much of 2012 in Ethiopia advising an "urban gardens" program that allowed women and children infected by HIV/AIDS to grow healthier food and, in turn, support their families.

Salerno '02 is a global health consultant for DAI, an international trade and development company in Washington, D.C., that is the largest supplier of technical assistance to USAID, the United States Agency for International Development. His work in Africa was part of a five-year, \$9 million USAID initiative.

Salerno originally majored in English because he loved to read. He switched to psychology because he believed it gave him more opportunities to apply his knowledge, especially in public health. At PC, he learned observational skills, statistics, and research methods, and held internships in immunology at Brown University and in epidemiology at the Rhode Island Department of Health. After graduation, he went to the Fiji Islands with the Peace Corps.

"I was encouraged to learn beyond campus," said Salerno. "Having internships, I acquired new real-world skills. Religion plays a huge role in the work I do because the communities I work in have strong religious values. PC made me sensitive to that." ■





2006

MEGHAN K. WELSH

• ENGLISH •

PRACTICES JOURNALISM IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

Not every English major carries three cell phones and a backpack in case she's called away on an overnight assignment. But that's life for Meghan K. Welsh '06, a Fox News Channel television producer in Washington, D.C. Last summer, she made her first trip on Air Force One, accompanying President Obama to Texas as the only TV producer in the 12-member press pool.

Welsh chose to major in English because she loved to write. PC's Washington Semester Program allowed her to learn all aspects of television as an intern with CBS News. She aggressively pursued summer internships and found one with CNN. By her senior year, she knew she wanted to work in Washington, and after graduation, became a production assistant for PBS' *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*. She joined Fox in September 2011.

Studying the liberal arts was perfect training, Welsh said. "I never thought I would be able to use the things I learned in Development of Western Civilization, but you'd be surprised at the references that come up in political speeches," said Welsh.

"Being an English major teaches you how to take a lot of information and boil it down. Because you study so many different things, you become a quick study. If you combine the knowledge you get from a liberal arts degree with real-world experience, you're ahead of someone who didn't go to a liberal arts school." ■



A full-page portrait of Marcus K. Dowling, a Black man with a shaved head and a goatee, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark grey V-neck sweater over a light-colored patterned collared shirt and dark denim jeans. He is sitting on a wooden stool with his arms crossed. The background is a dark, textured grey, and the floor is made of dark wooden planks.

2000
MARCUS K. DOWLING

• POLITICAL SCIENCE •

MANAGES WASHINGTON, D.C.'s LARGEST RECORDING STUDIO

Every morning, Marcus K. Dowling '00 wakes up excited to do “at least three or four amazing things.”

He is an account manager at Washington, D.C.’s oldest and largest recording studio, Listen Vision, and manages its online radio station, WLVS. He is editor-in-chief at BrooklynBodega.com, which produces the annual Brooklyn Hip Hop Festival under the Brooklyn Bridge. And he is a freelance writer and part owner of a public relations company that promotes Moombahton, a mix of reggaeton and house music.

What helps Dowling the most in his career? PC’s Development of Western Civilization Program.

“Civ is literally everything,” said Dowling. “Gaining an appreciation of the building blocks of society is the easiest way to put it. You are learning about religion, political theory, the history of the world, the great civilizations, how they came to be developed, and why they failed. You get that full knowledge of everything.”

Dowling worked as a research assistant for Brownfield projects after graduation but discovered his passion lay in the extracurricular activities he pursued in college with *The Cowl*, WDOM radio, and as president of Students Organized Against Racism.

“I have found where my passions are,” said Dowling. “When you find where your passion is, you have the desire to work very hard, harder than the average person does. That helps you out immensely.” ■



1990
STEPHEN FORNERIS
• ART HISTORY •

REFORMS BUILDING STANDARDS IN LATIN AMERICA

Stephen Forneris '90 went to Ecuador for the first time in 1994, shortly after earning a master's degree in architecture. Almost immediately, he was asked to design a building for someone.

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A top-down view of a desk with various items. In the top left, there's a globe and a magnifying glass. Below them is a pencil case with several pencils. A large black triangular ruler is in the center. To the right, there are several books, including one with a red cover and one with a green cover. A pen and a pencil are also visible.

It was his introduction to construction in Latin America, where building codes are non-existent, development is booming, and people die needlessly in fires and earthquakes because structures are substandard.

Forneris, an associate principal with Perkins Eastman in New York City, has made it his mission to change that.

After 2,000 people died in an earthquake in El Salvador in 2001, Forneris got Congress to adopt the Codes and Safety for the Americas Act, in the hope of establishing building standards in that country. But during an inspection tour with a newspaper reporter four years later, he found that the structures rebuilt with American dollars did not even comply with the seismic codes of Connecticut.

There was no way to change the law from the outside, he discovered. But he did not give up. Instead, he called on skills he learned at Providence College.

To make change, “you have to be able to write papers, compose thoughts and ideas, and communicate to varied cultures differently,” said Forneris. “You have to have the ability to look at a problem and creatively solve it; you have to understand philosophy, religion, and how they relate to different people; and you have to be very sensitive to others.”

Using a grant from The Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, Forneris wrote a 240-page guide, *Earthquake Resistant Housing: An Illustrated Manual for Building a Safe Home*. It offers step-by-step instructions on how to build a “popular house” — a home for the poorest of the poor — that can resist earthquakes. It is published in English, Spanish, and French for use in Haiti.

In November 2011, Forneris gathered representatives from the worldwide building and construction industry for a symposium at the Yale University School of Architecture.

After it, he co-founded the Campaign for Safer Building, dedicated to creating an alternative building code for the developing world. His goal now is to persuade the large companies he works with to make the code a part of each building contract, so it can be legally binding.

So far, two of his clients in Ecuador — one building a hospital, the other an international hotel — have agreed. When work is completed, the foundation will bring retired building inspectors from the U.S. to inspect the buildings for code compliance. Forneris hopes word about safe building will spread as locals see the results.

His humanitarian work is grounded in another principle he learned at PC.

“There’s a morality to it,” Forneris said.

In Latin America, where architecture fees are much lower than in the U.S., many professionals offer reduced services.

“That’s like a heart surgeon walking out on your operation once he feels you can no longer afford his expertise,” said Forneris. “I can’t sell work to people and not have them complete it correctly. I’ve turned away projects because I’m concerned clients won’t keep us involved until the end. They want to use your name and say a building is safe when it’s not.” ■



The Right Skills



CAREER CENTER DIRECTOR: Liberal arts' skill set matters most

By LIZ F. KAY

Students who major in the liberal arts don't necessarily have to work harder in their job searches than their peers in other fields, but they may need to work more strategically.

"It's the liberal arts student's responsibility to connect their major to whatever job they're going for. The employer isn't going to do it for you," said Patricia A. Goff, director of PC's Career Education Center.

The center has been renamed to emphasize its role in guiding students' career exploration and job searches. It now also has an associate director of alumni and community relations, who will help fill the job and internship pipeline through connections with graduates and parents.

“It’s the skill set you gained FROM YOUR MAJOR that you’re going to sell.”

— PATRICIA A. GOFF, director, Career Education Center



In addition, the center formed a Career Education Advisory Committee, whose alumni and parent members will discuss employment trends and serve as ambassadors for the center’s services in their geographic areas and industries.

PC offers opportunities to showcase liberal arts majors, said Goff. For example, this year was the first that seniors were invited to join the pre-selected interview portion of the Liberal Arts Recruiting Connection, a career fair in Boston, thanks to the efforts of Eileen Wisnewski, associate director for employer relations. Previously, organizers had restricted interviews to students enrolled at the original eight colleges that founded the consortium. Several premier consulting firms only consider pre-screened candidates there, so this was a great opportunity, Goff said.

Liberal arts majors may not know exactly where they want to go, Goff said. But that’s where the Career Education Center can help. As part of the Division of Student Affairs, the center is guided by the division’s core principles, particularly the one that stresses “contemplation and communication,” she said.

Goff said students could follow that principle when they consider what they got out of their major — why they loved it — and how they can convey that to an employer. Many successful people at the top of their fields majored in the liberal arts, and it’s the skills that they gained during those years of study that helped them achieve.

For example, an English major may have written more than 65 papers, honing writing, grammar, proofing, and other skills in the process, she said. “That’s what an employer wants to hear.”

“You’re selling your skill set from your major,” she said. “That’s where we come in. We help students frame that.”

Additional determining factors

Other skills emphasized in liberal arts majors include oral communications — there are lots of class presentations — as well as the critical thinking that all PC students acquire as part of the Development of Western Civilization Program, she said.

In addition, students should never overlook skills developed outside the classroom — through community service or involvement in student clubs or activities. Liberal arts majors can gain business-oriented skills such as event planning or managing a budget through organizing concerts, for example, or running fundraisers, Goff said.

It doesn’t matter if you’re applying to a marketing position but don’t have a marketing degree, she said.

“If you focus on the major, they’re going to focus on the major,” Goff said. “It’s the skill set you gained from your major that you’re going to sell.”

For more ideas, students can search Friarlink, the alumni database, to find out what those who graduated with the same major are doing.

They can also get a sense of how to characterize their skills by looking at how qualifications are described in the job listings for positions they are pursuing, Goff said. They also should talk to their professors and conduct informational interviews with alumni who already hold positions in their chosen fields, she added.

Networking nights and shadowing days can shed light on what a day in the life of a certain professional is really like — and how to navigate to such a position. Internships are another valuable way that students can gain work experience, make contacts within an industry, and determine whether a field is a good fit for them, Goff said.

“A liberal arts major is in tune with what might make them happy,” she said. “Hopefully, that bodes well for future decisions.” ■