

Newman in a nutshell

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For Newman, a university is an engaged community of teachers and learners, all active in the pursuit of truth. He draws a crucial distinction between education and instruction – instruction teaches us how to do something, but education teaches us why we might want to do – or not to do – that something. Education is not the mere piecemeal accumulation of knowledge, so it should never be ‘measured’ by the number of books read, the hours spent in lecture rooms or labs, the grades obtained, the exams passed, the qualifications credentialled. University graduates should be weighed not measured, – what is their quality, not what is their quantity.

Education is the term that Newman applies to this process of training the intellect, not for a specific profession, but for its own sake. Newman challenges the idea that the justification of an expensive university education is that it produces ‘added value’ for its consumers - tangible results in the form of employable graduates – engineers, doctors, accountants.... For Newman, the appropriate measure of the utility of education can not be a crude calculus of economic benefit, but whether the cultivation of our intellects will spread goodness [moral values] through the communities in which we live and move and have our being (Dante). ‘Though the useful is not always good, the good is always useful’. So although the university properly imparts particular skills, its wider ambition should always be to build intellectual capacity in all its students, no matter what discipline they are pursuing. Nor should its overriding justification be that it produces excellent practitioners of specific professions, who can earn incomes that justify the expense of their education: rather, the purpose of a university is to produce graduates who will contribute positively to society. Knowledge is holistic, but the various disciplines must not be dogmatic for they supplement each other; they each offer partial pictures.

For Newman, if God is the source of the natural and social worlds, then the study of theology cannot be excluded. And we must also consider how it is that we ‘know’ what we ‘know’ or think that we ‘know: hence the study of Philosophy. Newman advocates ardently for both Theology and Philosophy as essential to the intellectual formation of every student who enters a university. University education should consider the relationships among the disciplines, encouraging students to contemplate the parallels and connections that make all knowledge a unity. Newman sought to deepen the agenda of our searching, and to make sure that we pose the appropriate questions, rather than to seek glib cookie-cuttered answers. Education within a Newman framework seeks to foster a particular type of student: the person

with a broadly formed intellect. This educational tradition is not focused on practical learning or indeed on religious instruction. Rather, its ambition is to nurture a particular orientation and a generous approach to knowledge, a willingness to embrace what we don't yet know rather than retreat into the narrow certainties of our existing ideas, a blend of faith and reason, and a desire to elevate the wider good of society through one's life-long contribution.

A university fosters intellectual culture for its own sake, not as an instrument of church, or state or wealth creation. Newman placed his university under the providential care of 'Sedes Sapientiae, Ora Pro Nobis' ('Seat of Wisdom, Pray for Us'), one of the titles from the Loreto Litany of the Blessed Virgin. He distinguishes between *Scientia* (knowledge – knowing stuff) and *Sapientia* – (wisdom – knowing how to apply that knowledge in the proper pursuit of leading a good life). The university should not shrink into being a bureaucratic or managerial purveyor of practical or professional training for mercenary purposes. And to do that, it needed a community of students, not 'an ice-bound, petrified, cast-iron university, and nothing else: if we swim around icebergs, we grow cold' (Newman)