

Aims of Education VI Inventions 1998
By Donald R. Booth, Ph.D. Professor of Economics

Preface: First presented in 1993, the annual Aims of Education Address is an academic tradition that symbolically opens the school year during Chapman's new student orientation week. This year, I invited Dr. Donald Booth, Professor of Economics, to share with incoming students and their parents and partners his unique perspective as a 40-year member of the Chapman's largest and best-prepared incoming freshman class ever in Memorial Hall on August 26, 1998. Because of your commitment to higher education, I think you will enjoy Dr. Booth's perspective on inventing one's own educational aims. You are invited to share your thoughts with Dr. Booth, or with me.

-James L. Doti. President of Chapman University

Parents and students, welcome to Chapman University.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to share my views about the aims of education with you. Since this is the sixth consecutive lecture on the aims of education, I think I can safely assume that there is no agreement as to those aims, or we would just give the same lecture over and over. My comments will be limited to my own views and focus only on higher education.

Next Monday morning at 8 a.m. in Reeves Hall 101, I will meet about 30 students in my microeconomics class. Some of you will be in that room with me, beginning your first class in higher education. Also at that very moment I will begin my 40th year of teaching economics at Chapman. I know that you are excited, uneasy, and a little nervous about how well you will do. I want you to know that, after all these years, I still have those same feelings. I get nervous about opening day with a new class, but I also share your excitement and anticipation of making new friends and sharing new ideas.

Inventing Your Own Education

I am sure you all come with some goals or objectives in mind. For many it is to get a degree, in some cases as fast as possible. As I advise students, this objective is easy to spot. The first question is, "Will this course count toward my degree?" For those with a degree on the mind, a follow-up question involves, "How difficult is this course?" In this case the student is really saying, "What do I have to do to get a degree with the least effort?" My answer is always the same: "Go to another university."

A second goal seems to be getting a job. Preferably a high-paying job that is exciting, interesting, and located either in a.) a romantic overseas location or b.) between Huntington Beach and San Clemente in an office with an ocean view.

There is a reason behind revealing these preferences. Everyone has told you that a degree is essential for your future, and you need to go on in school in order to get a good job. Ever since you were 10 years old people have asked you what you want to do when you grow up. For a few years, a frivolous answer was fine. Lately they expect a serious answer, even if you do not yet have one. Now that you are here, perhaps for the wrong reasons, I would like to take a few minutes of your time to tell

you my philosophy regarding the aims of higher education at the undergraduate level. In doing so, I also hope to motivate you to plan your time at Chapman so that you receive the truly great education we make available. One aim of education is both personal and individual, whereas another aim is social and collective. I would like to elaborate on each.

One Good Aim: Reinventing Yourself

In 1949, I entered college as a freshman determined not to be the shy, retiring person I was in high school. So I took public speaking and debate. It was an excruciatingly painful, difficult experience. The only thing that got me through the experience was the knowledge that nobody knew what I was really like. I felt I was acting and everyone thought it was the real me. I believe that experience changed my life, and it changed the person I became. It also taught me that I could be who I wanted to be.

I believe that now is the time for you to find out who you are and who you want to be. It is time to invent the person you want to become. This is the time to explore, to be creative, and to challenge. You will learn from this reading and reflection. Do not just read for the recreation and amusement. You do not have time to waste. Read for great ideas. Read the books that have changed our lives. For good or evil, books have been powerful purveyors of ideas. From the Federalist Papers to the Communist Manifesto; from Shakespeare to Faulkner; from Thoreau to Martin Luther King – read, read, read.

Before you sign up for a course look at the text; find out what you can about the professor; and choose those courses that will stretch your mind. Do not just fill boxes on a degree evaluation form.

Somewhere on campus is a faculty member who will change your life. I know the ones who changed mine. People like Don Perkins, Jimmie Utter, Edgar Sholund and Bert Williams became my mentors – they shaped the kind of teacher I wanted to become.

This past week I had the happy honor to escort around the campus an alumna who was returning after 25 years. She is a physician in an emergency room in Atlanta, after majoring in French and Spanish at Chapman. She told me it was Dr. Virginia Carson, a biology teacher, who inspired her with the confidence that she could give up a successful career as a language teacher and go through medical school. There is a teacher like Dr. Carson out there waiting to become your mentor. Find her!

Expand your Education Outside the Classroom

Learning can take place all around you. We have students from all over the world who come with a wealth of knowledge different from yours. You can learn geography, history, language, and religion from other students. This past year in one class alone, I had students from Tunisia, Mexico, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Turkey. I know more about these countries than ever before. These students were my teachers.

In addition there are music events, drama performances, lectures, demonstrations, symposia. Opportunities to learn are all around you. Seize them. In

the recent past, we have had lectures by the Prime Minister of Russia, the Foreign Minister of Armenia, Edward Olmos, the actor, and many others. This past year, Martin Luther King III followed in his father's footsteps by lecturing at Chapman University.

Visit faculty in their offices. Form study groups. Seek out tutors. Get help from the Writing Center. We offer all of these resources for you to learn, but you must aggressively act in order to take advantage of these opportunities.

If you do all these things, you will acquire a broad liberal education that will enhance your understanding of the world in which you live. You will not react like Pavlov's dog, salivating at the sound of a school bell. Nor will you rely upon something physically stimulating, like rides in an amusement park, for your most rewarding experiences. You will not rely upon material things like a Lexus or a Rolex to make your life worthwhile. Nor will you need drugs and other stimulants to escape reality. You will think, reason, and feel. You will not believe that all human action is merely natural behavior. You will develop clear concepts of right and wrong, moral and immoral, ethical and unethical. You will be able to pass judgment, and you will be willing to judge yourself.

The kind of education I am describing will allow you to use the symbols of culture to challenge your mind in a truly liberating way. In other words, I believe Joyce Kilmer was wrong when he wrote, "I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree." Written words can evoke images and thoughts more lovely than a tree. I prefer the images created by Emily Dickinson when she wrote.

*I never saw a moor
I never saw the sea
Yet know I how the heather looks
And what a wave must be.*

That shows the power of words. If you choose wisely you will develop into an inquisitive, searching individual who finds joy in learning and also leads a moral, productive life. Develop your own capabilities so that you can find out who you are and the person you want to become. Go forth and invent yourself.

Your Education is Our Collective Aim

However, there is a collective goal for society that is one of the aims of education. The more educated you become, the more we all gain. It takes people with inquiring minds to sort through public issues and make good choices for us all. That role falls to each of us either as a public servant, a voter, or as a provider of service to others.

How do we respond to acts of terrorism? How much should we invest to find cures for AIDS or breast cancer? What should be done to reduce threats to our physical environment? This is but a small sample of the questions that require our collective action. Better-educated citizens will make better choices.

In order to achieve this aim of education, the faculty should, and does, require certain courses of all students. Our Freshman Seminar is clearly a move in the direction of producing citizens with a global perspective. Courses in history,

political science, sociology, and economics can help produce citizens informed about public issues. Studies in art, music, philosophy, and religion can give you knowledge of our rich cultural heritage that is so much a part of our collective lives. Science courses can inform you about the interaction of our individual actions and the collective effect on the environment in which we live. All of this knowledge is crucial to becoming a responsible citizen.

I think it is also important for each of you to become actively involved in service to the community in order for us to achieve the aim of developing a socially responsible citizen. Take time to serve in a charitable endeavor. Become an intern in a branch of government. Become active in a club with a program of social outreach. These experiences will educate you in ways impossible to duplicate in the classroom. By doing so, you will begin the process of becoming a person aware of responsibilities that lie beyond individual interests.

Your task is to educate yourself for your life as an individual and as a participant in society. Identify the specific strategies that you will employ to reach these objectives. Have a measurable plan. Each semester review your progress and revise your strategy. In the process you will get a degree and someone out there will be eager to employ you. Even more importantly, you will find life infinitely stimulating and rewarding wherever you are and no matter what job you hold.

When you have reached these twin aims of education, you will be at peace with yourself and a blessing for us all.

I look forward to being a part of the great adventure you now undertake. Thank you for sharing your life with me.

About the Speaker

Dr. Donald R. Booth is a professor of economics in the Chapman University School of Business and Economics. A noted expert in the fields of price theory, environmental economics, Russian and Chinese economic systems and international trade, Dr. Booth is a consultant to the Claremont Institute, and a frequent guest speaker and moderator of debates. He serves as Faculty Editor to the *Economic and Business Review*, published annually by the School of Business and Economics. In 1995, he was named Faculty of the Year by the Chapman Alumni Association.

Dr. Booth is one of the contributors to *The Global Citizen*, second edition, published by the Freshman Seminar Program in 1996, and was founding director of the university's Executive MBA Program.