



(Above photo courtesy of Justin Hartsell.)

Strategic Planning to Keep Liberal Arts

By: Justin Hartsell

EMORY, Va. — Emory & Henry College is strategically planning to keep the liberal arts as an institutional cornerstone for its future.

It is no secret on campus that the college has been trying to balance finances, increase student enrollment while nestled in a rural area and promote the sciences and healthcare fields. This has caused questioning about if the institution is looking to walk away from its identity as a liberal arts college and where the institution is headed in general, according to town halls where students and alumni asked administration about these very topics.

In light of this, E&H is forming a strategic plan to resolve pressing issues, with one of the primary focuses being to keep the liberal arts at the institution.

Provost John Wells said, “One of the things that we are doing, in many respects, is that we are doubling-down.”

Wells went on to explain that the college has set up “work groups” to help with the strategic planning. “One of the...work groups is specifically looking at liberal arts,” said Wells, with another two focusing on “our church relatedness, and our commitment to the region.”

Wells addressed the college's current institutional challenges by saying, "We are in the most disruptive period since the Reformation. It's really hard to think it does not require some response. Our goal is to be sensitive to a changing world."

"One of the greatest strengths in the liberal arts is the flexibility in thinking. We are using liberal arts to be responsive... The liberal arts emphasizes flexibility and innovation."

E&H administration wants to maintain a liberal arts curriculum for students and to put the students first. Wells said, "The hallmark here is project-based learning. It allows students to see themselves in their research. They get to follow their intellectual curiosity here. The expectation here is students will be intellectually empowered. It is encouraged."

President Jake Schrum said, "The purpose of a liberal arts education is to liberate the mind. What thoughtful person doesn't want a liberated mind?"

Schrum said, "The founders of our country all had a liberal arts education. They assumed that most voters in our democracy also would have a basic liberal arts education. Unfortunately, most voters don't. For this reason, I believe our democracy is at risk. This is why what we do at Emory & Henry is so important..."

According to US News, STEM fields also benefit from a liberal arts education, saying, "It's the type of education that requires you to think broadly and not assume there is one way to find a clear and correct answer – or that such an answer exists."

US News continued by elaborating on how STEM field employers "want people who can communicate and learn quickly outside of their comfort zone, both traits better fostered by a liberal arts education..."

E&H is, thus, strategically planning to facilitate student learning by offering a liberal arts education that will help them as a student, citizen and employee.