

# Interpretation of mark edmundson's essay

[Education](#), [University](#)



It seems that in this day and age the college curriculum does not only put emphasis on the giving and receiving of facts and information, but is inevitably being pushed in the direction of student entertainment. Subjects such as literature, philosophy, and history are not as popular as they once were, and are in danger of becoming extinct in the academic world. Mark Edmundson's essay, "The Uses of a Liberal Education", provides many interesting and valid points on why the liberal arts field is becoming devalued in the education system. According to Edmundson, the origin of devaluation in the liberal art's program can be traced to consumerism. The idea of consumerism, to be put simply, is to get more bang for your buck. Colleges are the most competitive institutions in the world. How do college campuses attract the richest, smartest, most athletic students? Campuses erect extravagant buildings with the most high-tech equipment to attract the potential student. "Before they arrive, we ply the students with luscious ads, guaranteeing them a cross between summer camp and lotus land" (Edmundson 46). When colleges send out pamphlets and packets about their institution, most of the pictures are of non-academic things, such as, the school's amazingly expensive gymnasium, or their two million dollar swimming pool. The idea of education and learning gets lost in the translation when trying to recruit new students. Given a choice of showing potential students pictures of campus over a sheet of information on classes, chances are that aesthetics of the campus will win their attention hands down. This is an example of a true consumerist attitude. Students, also known as consumers, strive for an entertainment value before exercising their brains in a classroom. This is why professors are feeling the pressure to

be more entertaining with their lesson plans and lectures. Which is the lesser evil, entertaining and keeping the classroom full or sticking to a professional teaching strategy? Students who are not entertained in their classes have the liberty to withdraw from them, in a timely fashion, without penalty. In turn, decreasing numbers in particular subjects send up red flags to college administrators. Administrators might ask, " Why is nobody interested in taking Foundations of Philosophy? Is this a subject that really needs to be in the curriculum?" A decrease in student numbers means a decrease in department funding, and this is where the Liberal Arts department can run into hot water. Without students and funding, the department in question will, in essence, shrivel up and die. However, there are a few ways to keep the numbers in the classroom. The first way to keep students awake is to keep them entertained. Nobody wants to hear a monotone professor lecture for almost two hours about World War I. If that same professor were to shake things up a bit and have a reenactment or tell some WWI jokes, the student's attention is there, and the danger of losing them diminishes. The second way to appeal to a large audience of students is for a professor to compromise his beliefs and exercise grade inflation. Grade inflation is basically, loosening up and going easy on the grading policy. Edmundson sees the events of entertainment and grade inflation as a serious problem with colleges today. Of course a student will take a class they can get an easy A in, over a class that will make them think. Higher GPA's means happier students and parents, and increasing student population for the university. Since the students and their parents essentially " bought" this education, the college must keep them happy. Although college is the time when students should

be breaking out of their shell and learning to become their own person, it does not always seem to happen that way. When looking at students on a college campus, it seems that the majority of them look the same. Conformity is one of the major factors that comes into play in the years after high school. According to Edmundson, students seem desperate to blend in and not make a spectacle of themselves. In a classroom, students generally prefer to work in groups because it is more comforting to work with other people in the same position as you; so in the event of being wrong or embarrassed, the blame is not solely your own. Working with other students all the time leads to a lack of one's self opinions. This type of conformity leads to the abolition of one's own ideas, thoughts, and beliefs. How does a student break out of the mold and begin to live their own life and be their own person? One way for a student to recognize their own potential is to challenge them. Humanities courses require a student to actually use their own minds. It is difficult to breeze through a history, philosophy, or Latin course without actually doing work. A student either knows it, or they don't. Being awake and aware in classes such as literature forces a student to think for themselves. When a student exercises their brain, they gain a sense of self worth and value. A feeling of self worth leads to becoming an individual and breaking out of the stereotypical conformity that college life forces upon them. Mark Edmundson raises important questions and points in this essay that are worth thinking about. If people do not step outside the box and take a look at our present college system, it will continue on its downward spiral of consumerism. Yes, it is fun and entertaining to have a comedic professor, but there is so much more than that. We, as a nation, need to get back to

the basics. Learning and utilizing the information that is being taught in college is essential. Everyone is born with their own mind, all that is left to do is break out of the stereotypical college student mold, and use it.

Edmundson, Mark. The Uses of a Liberal Education. University of Virginia. 39-49.