

Resolved: It is better to be a jack-of-all-trades than a master of one.

Affirmative: Ghengis Khan '13

Negative: Ernest Hemingway '15

Here at Bowdoin College we are promised a 'general' education. We are offered classes in the natural and social sciences, humanities and languages, art and music. That is the offer of a liberal education. Certainly, we all pick majors and concentrations in the end, but what is it that makes our education valuable? Our specialty or our various proficiencies?

On the one hand, we can argue for generality. We can prioritize the capacity to be able to communicate with someone devoted to any craft. We might find the inter-applicability of various concepts and, in the process, perhaps we might discover the essence that connects all endeavors. And yet, if we value breadth over depth, might we become so general as to become vague? Might our conversations amongst so many diverse individuals cease to be interesting because we sacrifice any substantive foothold on the altar of intellectual diversity?

So, perhaps we may conclude that specialization is the thing. We may strive to find that one area, that one passion, that captivates us above all else. Through such a calling, we have the opportunity to push the limits of what has been thought, known, or even questioned. Specialization affords the possibility of original discovery. It flaunts the grail of total mastery and fluency. And yet, could that choice render our pursuits narrow? Could it make us inaccessible, even irrelevant?

What say you?

Please join the society tomorrow evening (Thursday, the 14th) at 7:30pm in the Faculty Room of Massachusetts Hall. Dress to please St. Valentine.

Lovingly yours,
Maimon of Cordoba