Discussion guidance for the common readings of HSA10, The Economics of Oil and Energy

Discussion guidance for "Liberation and the Liberal Arts" by Robert Pippin

Robert Pippin is a very distinguished philosopher from the University of Chicago. This is a transcript of a talk given in 2000 during freshman orientation.

(1) From Pippin's perspective, what is a "liberal arts" education. How would you define it? In what sense is it "liberal" - what does that word mean in this context?

(2) Perhaps the most important question here - what is the objective of the liberal arts education? Why does Pippin promote it? What is its pedagogical value? Do you generally agree with Pippin, in whole or in part?

(3) Pippin reminds us that the percentage of majors in the Liberal Arts have fallen substantially over the years (over 100 years and still falling) and have been placed with an increase in majors in business, economics, and communications (he does not mention the latter). To the extent you can tell, why does Pippin think this is true? Why do you think it is true?

(4) You could have and still can major in the humanities and any of the other majors that strongly reflect the spirit of the liberal arts as described by Pippin. Why did you not choose a major in the humanities?

[On the remaining questions don't feel obliged to patronize me. I don't care what your opinions are. I just care that you have them].

(5) Do you believe that the tradition explained, justified, and promoted by Pippin should or must be a significant part of any college education, including at a school that offers only science, math and engineering majors? If your answer to this question is yes, do you agree with the justification provided by Pippin (question 2) or for another reason or for more reasons that he offers? If your answer is no, then why is it no?

(6) [Optional - I am not going to require anyone to answer this]: A recent survey of college graduate salaries ranked Harvey Mudd first in the nation in alumni earnings. Did information like this affect either your choice of colleges or your choice of majors? Did it affect any role played by your parents in either of these choices? Do you think that your parents are pleased that you have chosen a school with such a promising financial outcome?

Discussion guidance for the Harvey Mudd College original brochure

This portion of the brochure was written by Harvey Mudd's first president, physicist Joe Platt, followed by an introductory segment that reflects his point of view. In that is a single paragraph that still reflects the general mission of this school.

(7) Dr. Platt's message still largely represents the spirit of the college. Given all of the other promotional material that you read when considering this college, in your mind is it still a credible message? Is it still inspiring? After all, 50 years have passed and the world has really changed, just like he said it would in his paragraph. Is this perception too narrow, naive, or is it right on the money, or somewhere in between?

(8) Dr. Platt writes "Past experience shows that small colleges with good teachers have produced many more of their share of the leaders in pure science and applied science." What form or kind of leadership might be writing about here? Leading in what way?
Discussion guidance for Traditional MBA skill set ...

This was recently published in the Financial Times and is in reference to MBA programs, not undergraduate programs, and certainly not Harvey Mudd. The author may have never heard of Harvey Mudd.

(8) [Serious question]. If you haven't yet done so, don't read the questions below this until in your own mind you have answered this question: Why is Professor Evans asking me to read this?

(9) The author of this article also describes a changing world. What is changing about it according to her?

(10) What does the author find lacking in traditional MBA programs and what changes, generally does she propose.

(11) Your teacher generally agrees with her but also feels nearly the same critique can be leveled at undergraduate schools like Harvey Mudd. In fact if you look at the first paragraph on the second page (beginning with the word "Uncertainty ...") if you substitute the word "engineering and science" for the word "MBA" and eliminate the penultimate word "business" (to make it more inclusive) your teacher thinks that paragraph would fit nicely into a new HMC mission statement.

(12) Do you think that an emphasis on "leadership" should be part of a liberal arts undergraduate curriculum? Or should that only be part of a business or political science program?

Discussion guidance for "Capabilities of Effective Engineering Leaders." by Bernard Gordon

Gordon is using an expanded definition of "engineering" here. He is referring to men and women with technical backgrounds, including engineers, but also computer scientists and other scientists working in applied fields, typically in a business environment, but expandable to any organizational structure. The targeted audience is for students in an engineering leadership program at MIT. We don't have such a program here, but the lessons possibly still apply.

Read this document loosely and casually. Don't read into it too deeply. Try to develop a sense of the MIT view of the leadership "package."

(13) Did this range of skills or this orientation surprise you when you read it? If you were to summarize this perspective in two or three bullet-points, what would you say? What does the leader need to know according to the Gordon program at MIT? [For example - a leader must be aware of context].

(14) OK, one more time - do you think that a legitimate liberal arts program should offer leadership to its students? If so, do you think it should be an option or required (which is to say, some required course or program)