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## The Pursuit of Freedom through the Spirit of Inquiry: The St. Norbert College Liberal Arts Identity Statement

### FROM OUR FOUNDING TO OUR FUTURE

From its earliest days, St. Norbert College has been dedicated to providing its students with, in the words of our Mission Statement, “an educational environment that fosters intellectual, spiritual, and personal development.” Father Bernard Pennings began teaching Latin declensions to 15-year-old Francis Van Dyke in the rectory kitchen in October 1898. Three more students joined the class several days later. The first graduating class in 1904 consisted of eight students, seven from the commercial department and one from the classics department.

From those humble but auspicious beginnings has arisen a modern liberal arts college with the full array of academic programs, from classics to commerce, philosophy to physics, theology to biology. Today’s liberal arts and sciences curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, social justice, and international awareness. A St. Norbert College student encounters opportunities for vocational discernment, career preparedness, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for fulfilling lives and responsible citizenship. The liberal arts tradition joins with our Catholic and Norbertine heritage to form a cohesive institutional identity that serves our students’ interests, supports our community values, and inspires an active concern for the world at large.

### THE LIBERAL ARTS TRADITION

The idea of the *Liberal Arts* begins with the Latin verb *liberate*, to make free. The particular goal of a liberal arts education is to help students become and remain free: the essential purpose of our nation and our institutions. Etymologically a liberal arts education—*liberalis educare*—means to “draw out” or “lead” others and ourselves to freedom through lifelong learning. The liberal arts tradition inspires in its students a love of learning and provides the skills requisite to carry their learning beyond the confines of the College environment to extend over the course of a lifetime. In today’s fast-paced world of change, an education that emphasizes lifelong learning is critical in that the specific skills taught today may find themselves antiquated tomorrow, but the ability to continually teach oneself is a skill that will never find itself out of date.

The Liberal Arts tradition inspires an educational regimen firmly grounded on a strong moral and ethical foundation. Our Catholic and Norbertine mission upholds human dignity, encourages the search for truth through dialogue, and promotes a Scripture-based vision of justice in a welcoming yet rigorous intellectual environment. Our conception of the liberal arts is broadly inclusive, comprising the Humanities, the Natural Sciences, the Social Sciences—including those disciplines that undergird the curricula in the Schneider School of Business and Economics—and the Visual and Performing Arts.

## AN EDUCATION WITH RANGE AND DEPTH

The concept of the *artes liberales* goes back to Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle through the idea of *enkuklios paideia*, encyclopedic learning or “learning in a circle,” trying to encompass and comprehend as much of the world as one can. A liberal arts education leads us to an enlightened appreciation for the physical, natural, and human worlds. As we marvel at each new discovery, our grounding in inductive reasoning, deductive logic, and the scientific method empowers us to critically evaluate what we learn. We also observe the power of these methodologies in elucidating the patterns of human behavior, enterprise, and culture. In all contexts, we appreciate the value of a well-designed empirical study. As the collective body of human knowledge increases, the liberal arts tradition calls on us to look for the broader implications of each discovery and consider the ethical deployment of each emergent technology. Our appreciation of diverse cultures further primes us to anticipate the effects of innovation on communities other than our own. Our liberal arts training equips us to view each new discovery not with bewilderment, but with wisdom, humility and awe. Sharing this tradition with our students helps them achieve both a fundamental and an expansive understanding of the complex process of living in and contributing to our world.

The St. Norbert conception of the liberal arts experience extends beyond the classroom. The

cultivation of mind and spirit and character involves our interactions with our students, and their interactions among themselves at a level which integrates their studies with the skills essential to community life. St. Norbert College is devoted to the Norbertine spirit of *communio*, for learning is done best with and for others, united in the common enterprise of serving humankind.

A devoted study of the liberal arts serves to train the mind, enliven the spirit, and cultivate our ethical sensibilities. In tandem with the practical and technical arts such as medicine, law, commerce, or digital technologies, it trains students for success in a profession but also inspires them to be thoughtful and caring citizens. The practical may also *liberate*, in that it leads to ways to make a living and contribute to one’s community. Liberal is practical, and practical should be liberal. All disciplines that support freedom of inquiry, citizenship, and development of the whole person contribute to and participate in the liberal arts.

The spirit of liberal learning flourishes at St. Norbert College, inspiring us as teachers, scholars, and practitioners of our various crafts. It is with firm conviction that we embrace the liberal arts tradition as the foundation stone of a free and just society and confident in its power to inspire each new generation of students with the values of free inquiry, a love of learning, and responsible citizenship.