



Perspectives of Lecturers on Liberal Arts in Indonesia

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In the 'Asian century,' Asian liberal arts education is bucking the trend of its counterpart in the US, and is on the rise. This article considers the case study of one substantial faculty of liberal arts in Indonesia, in order to contribute to our understanding of this important phenomenon. Within the broader question of what constitutes Asian liberal arts, this case study considers the specific issue of what lecturers themselves think they are contributing to, as members of a faculty of liberal arts. An analysis of interviews with this whole department of 46 lecturers suggests that they draw on distinctive sources of information, and arrive at three main emphases in their understanding of what constitutes liberal arts: 1) proficiency in general knowledge and skills; 2) cultivation of spirituality; and 3) integration of Christian faith and secular vocation. The lecturers also hold in common the values of student interaction and university-wide cooperation in the pursuit of liberal arts education. Given that lecturers play a key role in the enactment of educational curricula, understanding their own assessment of liberal arts is an important component of understanding liberal arts in Asia.

Introduction

In the 'Asian century' (Mahbubani 2008), Asian liberal arts education is bucking the trend of its counterpart in the US, and is on the rise (Yang 2016). This is particularly striking, because the decline of liberal arts in the US has been said to exemplify an educational 'crisis of massive proportions and grave global significance' (Nussbaum 2016, 1), with a movement away from the betterment of persons toward the production of profit-makers. In this context, it is important for the world to be asking: what is liberal

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arts in Asia? How is it similar or different to liberal arts education in Europe and the US?

Given that liberal arts in East Asia appears to be contested in terms of its definition and aims (Bog and van der Wende 2016), this essay considers the case of one substantial faculty of liberal arts in Indonesia, in order to contribute to our understanding of this important phenomenon. Within the broader question of what constitutes Asian liberal arts, the case relates to the specific issue of what it is lecturers themselves think they are contributing to, as members of a faculty of liberal arts. This is important, because teachers themselves are influential actors in the enactment of educational policy (O'Donoghue and Vidovich 2004). Thus, their perspectives on the nature of their task can affect the manner in which it is undertaken.

The Context

There is contestation regarding the definition and aims of liberal arts. This can be seen worldwide, but is particularly visible in Asia, where liberal arts colleges and departments have been growing (Fischer 2012). A small body of literature has been attempting to understand this diversity in Asian liberal arts education. You (2014, 2015) surveys liberal arts in China and finds a cautious, gradual embrace of an approach to education that is hoped to create broad, globally prepared citizens. Nussbaum (2016) points to innovation in liberal education in India from a century ago, which is now in grave danger of being neglected and rejected in favour of more profitable styles of education. Jung et al (2016) survey the enactment of liberal arts at various colleges or departments in China, Korea, and Japan, finding a range of motivations and practices.

In terms of comprehensive definitions of liberal arts, Chopp's threefold delineation has been one influential approach. Chopp highlights the three educational foundations of 'critical thinking, moral and civil character, and using knowledge to improve the world.' (Jung et al 2016, 5).

Another useful approach is that of Bog and Van der Wende (2016). According to their analysis, various aims for liberal arts education appear to be in competition. Some colleges or universities emphasise epistemological aims (promoting interdisciplinary knowledge); some emphasise economic aims (promoting the employability of graduates); some emphasise social-moral aims (promoting holistic citizenship).

These accounts of liberal arts education will be referred to in the analysis of the perspectives of University X lecturers below, though they do not represent a fixed interpretative grid.

University X is a comprehensive private Christian university in Indonesia that has been in existence for under three decades. The university's faculty of liberal arts serves students from all regular faculties, by providing units of study that are taken as part of a mandatory liberal arts component of every undergraduate degree. This component occurs alongside the student's specialised studies, and may include different units depending on the student's particular course and religious affiliation. There are three departments in the faculty of liberal arts: Theology and Religion; Philosophy; and Language and Life Skills. The Theology and Religion Department includes subjects such as World Religion, Christian Religion, and Christian Worldview. The Philosophy Department includes subjects such as History of Thought, Philosophy of Science, Critical Thinking, Ethics, Civics, and Introduction to Natural Science. The Language and Life Skills Department includes subjects such as English, Indonesian, Literature, Introduction to Art and Aesthetics, Health and Wellness, and Academic Skills.

Central Question and Method

The research question developed for this qualitative study was: What are the perspectives of liberal arts lecturers at University X on liberal arts education? This question suggested an interpretivist paradigm, with the goal of understanding the complex meanings

that lecturers themselves bring to their lived experience (O'Donoghue 2007).

It was decided to pursue a case study, so that the question of the nature of liberal arts in Asia might be addressed with some depth, in one particular location. It will emerge that the theory generated in this essay may be partially applicable to other Asian colleges or departments of liberal arts, and will contribute to a growing picture of liberal arts in this region. This picture ought to be of interest to educators beyond the boundaries of Asia.

Data collection occurred by means of interviews. No pre-specified conceptual framework was adopted for the study; interviewees were asked very open questions about their perspectives on liberal arts education, and every interview went beyond the core questions that had been prepared. While existing accounts of the definition and aims of liberal arts education were investigated beforehand, these were not discussed with the interviewees, or used as categories for classification. Rather, a conceptual framework for the findings emerged as the study progressed. While there was a focus on the micro-level of the faculty itself, attention was also given to influences at national and global levels.

It was made clear to interviewees that the study was not funded by or accountable to the university, and that all responses would be kept anonymous. To avoid any sort of bias in participant, choice, all members of the faculty were interviewed. This carried the added benefit of providing a truly comprehensive study of this faculty of liberal arts.

The study consisted, then, of semi-structured one-to-one interviews with all liberal arts lecturers from University X. To be clear, of this faculty of 48 lecturers, only the dean and the interviewer were excluded, resulting in 46 interviews. The interviews were recorded. They took place mostly in English, but translators were supplied when required (amounting to four instances).

Core interview questions included the following:

- What is ‘liberal arts,’ in your opinion?
- What are your aims in contributing to liberal arts education? Why do you have these aims?
- What strategies do you use to achieve these aims for liberal arts education? Why do you use these strategies?
- How significant are the aims and the strategies that you use? Are some more important to you than others? Why?
- What outcomes do you expect to achieve as you pursue these aims and strategies? Why do you hope for these outcomes?
- Given the choice, would you prefer to be in a faculty of liberal arts, or in a specialised department?

Other questions were added, depending on the direction that each interview took. During this stage of data collection, analysis was concurrently occurring via coding and reflection, with the result that certain questions and themes became more prominent across the course of the interviews. Following the interviews, analytic induction was employed to move from the data to the point of generating theory about this case study.

Interviewees

The 46 lecturers that were interviewed were all based at the same campus, and were almost all full time. There were 14 female and 32 male lecturers, representing all three departments of the faculty (with some lecturers teaching in more than one department). Some had had prior careers in education, business, or Christian ministry before becoming lecturers, while others had become lecturers immediately after finishing their studies. Two of the lecturers were foreign expats, while the remainder were from various parts of Indonesia. The number of years the lecturers had served at the

university varied from 1 to 23, with over a third of lecturers (18) having worked there for five years or less. The dean of the faculty of liberal arts was not interviewed (though he gave his approval for the project), because the aim was to discern perspectives of regular lecturers rather than the university leadership.

Analysis: Generating Theory About Perspectives of Lecturers on Liberal Arts Education

During the interview process, it quickly became apparent that lecturers were drawing on three distinct sources of information about the definition and aims of liberal arts education. These influences will be discussed first, before attention is turned to differences and commonalities of perspectives.

Three Sources of Influences

Catholic Seminary or School. For at least six lecturers, their chief source of formative information about liberal arts was in their Catholic education, either at school or seminary. These lecturers were explicit about the importance of their Catholic education for their current understanding of the definition and aims of liberal arts. Of these six, five were either entirely or mostly based in the Department of Philosophy. As will be seen below, those who pointed to this information source shared a relatively similar understanding of, and motivation for, liberal arts education.

At this point, it is useful to consider briefly the nature of this global-level influence. An important element of a traditional Catholic understanding of liberal arts is its codification in Late Antiquity, followed by Christian appropriation of this codification. Martianus Capella (Stahl and Johnson 1977) is credited with making famous the idea of seven liberal arts, combining what would later become known as the *trivium* (grammar, dialectic, rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, music). These seven *artes liberales* were taken on and modified in such Christian works as Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (c. 524). Their enduring influence on certain streams of Catholic education may be in part

due to the approving outlook of Thomas Aquinas, a towering intellect of the Catholic tradition (Conway and Ashley 1959).

A comment from one lecturer was typical of those who had the same background: 'I heard about liberal arts in Catholic seminary.' One such lecturer was insistent that University X is not actually doing liberal arts, because it is out of step with a traditional structure:

Liberal arts takes seven subjects – the *trivium* and *quadrivium*.... If we want to do liberal arts, we should do the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. So we are not doing pure liberal arts, but modified.... We cannot do the *trivium* and *quadrivium* because of the [university] leadership and the nation – how can we liberate students? We cannot really do it here.

This was an idiosyncratic view. The rest of the lecturers who held to a traditional Catholic account of liberal arts seemed more content with its modification at University X.

MKDU. Another major contributing source for attitudes on liberal arts among the lecturers was the awareness or experience of *Mata Kuliah Dasar Umum* (known as MKDU). This refers to the general educational component that has been a mandatory feature of Indonesian university education since the Suharto era. Almost all interviewees who had conducted university education in Indonesia had experienced this educational component, and a number of them directly equated it with liberal arts. Others firmly distanced liberal arts from MKDU, seeing them as having very different aims. Again, this will be seen below, in the discussion of differences and commonalities of lecturers' perspectives.

It is useful at this point, however, to outline some of the features of this national-level influence. The account by Alwasilah and Puncocar is helpful (2016, 6-7):

Indonesia's MKDU consists of general education courses for first-year undergraduates in Indonesian public and private colleges and universities.... The original designers of the MKDU understood the liberal arts as foundational to a well-educated

citizenry for a strong Indonesian democracy.... The MKDU rationale is worthy, but instructors usually have limited training in active learning instruction and students typically evaluate MKDU classes as boring and easy.

One of the lecturers said, ‘MKDU is... about transferring government doctrine.’

It needs to be recognised that some nuance needs to be applied to the observation that several lecturers equated liberal arts with MKDU. For some of these lecturers, they meant that MKDU and liberal arts would be the same *at University X*, even though their practice at other universities might be very different. Other lecturers appeared to mean that liberal arts at University X is basically the same as MKDU *at other universities* (apart from containing more units).

One lecturer in language and critical thinking explained: ‘I had previously taught in MKDU – that is my background to liberal arts.’ A lecturer in English commented that liberal arts ‘is extended general education. It is like MKDU.’ A lecturer from the same department, who admitted that she lacked clarity on the subject, said, ‘I think [liberal arts] is the same as general education – but with more courses.’ Another lecturer in language said that there is ‘no difference, just labelling.’ A different lecturer in language was just as plain: ‘There is no difference between MKDU and liberal arts – just a difference of name. Only more courses are added.’ For these particular lecturers, their perspective appeared to be that liberal arts at University X was attempting to provide the same sort of general education as would be provided under the name MKDU at other universities – but with more courses.

A lecturer in the area of Life Skills said, ‘at [University X], MKDU and liberal arts are almost the same.’ Unlike the lecturers above, however, this was not making any comparison with MKDU at other universities. The lecturer went on to say that a key aim of liberal arts was the development of Christian faith.

One lecturer, who had been at the university for eight years, suggested that the tendency to equate liberal arts with MKDU was problematic, but was diminishing. He said that the faculty was established by ‘people who think of [liberal arts] as MKDU, or who split religion from science. They don’t all engage with the vision.... But things are improving.’

The University Itself. A third major source of information about liberal arts education for lecturers was University X itself. As a number of lecturers pointed out, liberal arts education is largely unknown in Indonesia. Most of the lecturers had had no experience of liberal arts, and little or no knowledge of the term, prior to their appointment at University X. Most lecturers did not plan to join a faculty of liberal arts, but rather to teach in their area of specialisation, which happened at University X to fall into the category of liberal arts. One particular subject area had formerly belonged to a separate department within the faculty of education at the university, but had since been folded into the faculty of liberal arts. Therefore the university leadership, through its decisions, practices, and communication, constituted a significant source of information about the definition and aims of liberal arts education. The particular impacts upon lecturers’ perspectives will be explored in the sections below.

At this point, however, it will be important to give further detail to implicit and explicit modes of this local-level influence. Implicitly, the university caused certain impressions among its lecturers by its actions and decisions. The very formation of a faculty of liberal arts – in a country in which liberal arts was not well known – communicated (for some) a conscious departure from MKDU. The decision to relocate one subject area from its own specialised department in another faculty to a much broader department within the faculty of liberal arts also offered implicit communication. To some of the lecturers who were affected, this move apparently communicated the idea that liberal arts is shallower than education in other faculties, because the classes in the new setting lacked the theoretical depth that lecturers had enjoyed in their previous department. Explicitly, the university leadership communicated

directly with lecturers about the definition and aims of liberal arts, through vision statements, discussions with the dean, and professional development sessions. The dean at the time of the interviews (March-April 2017) had been particularly influential in advocating a model of liberal arts based on ‘Christian worldview.’

One lecturer in theology commented, ‘Most people in Indonesia would think [liberal arts] means ‘arts’.... In Indonesia it’s very limited. I first heard of it at [University X].’ He went on to suggest that liberal arts has little appeal in Indonesia because it does not lead directly to jobs or money-making. Another lecturer identified liberal arts as ‘Western education,’ which she found out about at University X. One lecturer who had previously taught MKDU said, ‘Previously, I thought liberal arts was general knowledge [education], but now I realise it is more important for the vision and mission of [University X]... especially Christian worldview.’ A long term lecturer commented, ‘I read articles [to find out about liberal arts] and first thought it was the same as MKDU, but then [the dean mentioned above] gave me more information about what it is for us.’

Differences: Three Main Emphases

It is possible to identify three different emphases among lecturers, in terms of their perspectives on the definition and aims of liberal arts education. These emphases seem related to the three sources of information identified above, though they do not line up precisely.

Proficiency. The first main emphasis is on *proficiency*. By this is meant a tendency to view liberal arts as providing broad academic content and critical thinking abilities, so that graduates will be well-rounded in knowledge and skills that fall outside their area of specialisation. This emphasis coheres with the first and third of Chopp’s three foundations of liberal arts, noted above: ‘critical thinking’ and (to a lesser extent) ‘using knowledge to improve the world.’ It also coheres with the first of Bog and Van der Wende’s three types of arguments for liberal arts education: the ‘epistemological aim’ of providing interdisciplinary knowledge.

Given the setting of these lecturers in University X, it should be noted that this emphasis generally assumes that students' broad liberal arts education is supplementary to their specialised education (as with MKDU). This may be different to the US, where liberal arts can be conceived as an educational pathway in its own right.

One lecturer, who expressed dismay at students' lack of interest in subjects outside of their specialisation, insisted, 'once graduating, students must use broad skills!' Another said that liberal arts is 'education to make one think critically in everything.' A lecturer in civics said that the aim of liberal arts is 'to develop skills to participate positively in society.' A lecturer in philosophy commented, '[liberal arts] consists of general subjects... providing a basic foundation for all students to understand the important things in life, such as critical thinking.'

Some lecturers noted that the attempt to provide general proficiency was at odds with the expectations of students and their parents. One lecturer said that liberal arts 'supports students in learning how to integrate their major with other areas of education – because their major is narrowly specialised.' The lecturer added, 'In Asia this is unusual – there is an emphasis on specialisation.'

It is worth noting that among those lecturers who might be categorised as holding to an emphasis on proficiency, there was a rather sharp division between those with high motivation and those with low motivation for liberal arts education. Most lecturers were questioned about whether they would prefer to be in a faculty of liberal arts or in a specialised department. Those who had a preference for working in a specialised department were recognised as having a relatively low motivation for liberal arts itself, even if they might teach their subject/s with enthusiasm, and enjoy good morale in the workplace.

There appeared to be a correlation between low motivation for liberal arts, an emphasis on proficiency, and the identification of MKDU as a notable influence. Why might this be the case?

Certainly, MKDU emphasises supplementary broad knowledge, which is a feature of the ‘proficiency’ emphasis, but why was there a cluster of lecturers who shared this value, and yet had relatively low motivation for liberal arts education? One answer is that this group included a number of those who had previously been in a specialised department, and who had been folded into the faculty of liberal arts by the university’s restructuring. These lecturers had previously had the experience of teaching with great theoretical depth, and had perhaps expected career progression that included supervision of research. However, having been moved into the faculty of liberal arts, they were now teaching at a much more practical and basic level, and no longer had the same opportunities for research and supervision. Observing the similarities of their new work environment to their own experience of MKDU, they perceived the change as a step back from their former rigour and depth, and thus exhibited relatively low motivation for this style of education.

A lecturer in the department that had been folded into the faculty of liberal arts commented that she had ‘never heard of [liberal arts] until coming to [University X].’ She indicated that the difference between liberal arts and MKDU was just the breadth of subjects covered. Another lecturer in the same department gave a similar comment: ‘we used to have a general education department, but now it is called liberal arts. When it became a liberal arts department, it was enlarged.’ Another lecturer from the same department said, ‘liberal arts is the same as MKDU, but with more options.’ He added that he would prefer to be in a specialised department.

Comments from another lecturer, who likewise indicated a preference to teach in a specialised department, show the combination of the influence of MKDU, the emphasis on proficiency, and low motivation for liberal arts: ‘In liberal arts they learn not only about their major, but other areas.... MKDU didn’t impress me [as a student]. I just had to do it. I think students feel the same way about our courses.’

On the other hand, there was another cluster of lecturers who also held to an emphasis on proficiency, and yet who were highly motivated for liberal arts education. This cluster of lecturers largely came from subject areas within Life Skills and (applied) Philosophy. They were less likely than the cluster noted above to identify liberal arts with MKDU, and in fact generally believed that liberal arts was superior to MKDU in cultivating well-rounded, good citizens of Indonesia.

One such lecturer suggested that ‘liberal arts is much broader and more expansive than traditional general education,’ by which he meant MKDU. He proposed that ‘we need a cohesive system with a common vision, not just general education.’ Another highly motivated lecturer was positive about the success of liberal arts in promoting proficiency of knowledge and skills: ‘I think we are achieving [our aims]. I know some alumni, and they are well prepared for the job market and success.’

Spirituality. A second main emphasis that could be discerned among the lecturers’ perspectives on the definition and aims of liberal arts was *spirituality*. By this is meant a tendency to understand liberal arts as the cultivation of self-reflective students who seek to serve God and live with a Christian worldview. This conception of liberal arts accords with Chopp’s second foundation, ‘moral and civil character’ (though this is Christianised, to refer to Christian identity and character). It also squares with the third of Bog and Van der Wende’s arguments for liberal arts, embracing ‘social-moral aims.’

Given the historic links between Christianity and the liberal arts, this should not be dismissed as an anomalous or idiosyncratic feature of this particular university. It has been said that in the opening centuries of the Common Era, the ‘church appropriated liberal arts instructional methods for its own purpose of making Christians’ (Davis 2012, 40), resulting in a close relationship between Christianity and liberal education. In East Asia, the growth of liberal arts over the last several decades has often been linked to the influence of Christianity, and frequently includes explicit

theological and moral religious input (Jung et al 2016). One should not assume that the secularization that has occurred in many European and North American educational institutions (Burtchaeil 1998; Glanzer et al 2017) is a general feature of liberal arts education in Asia. Even in the US, despite secularisation, ‘Christian liberal arts’ remains significant, sometimes carrying the conviction that loving God ‘lies at the center of a Christian liberal arts education’ (Litfin 2014, 104).

Two particular categories of lecturers were especially associated with this emphasis. First, there were those whose field of teaching was theology and Christian worldview. These lecturers frequently viewed their own field as the centre of liberal arts education, and often expressed their educational aims in religious, rather than academic, terms. Taken as a group, these lecturers had the highest motivation for liberal arts education out of every subject area. Second, there were those lecturers who were relatively new to the university, and who had been highly influenced by the dean of the faculty of liberal arts (who at the time had been in the position for four years). Largely due to his influence, they understood that liberal arts was centrally about the formation of Christian worldview. For some lecturers in fields other than theology, this apparently led to some confusion about their own place within the faculty, and thus, to reduced motivation for liberal arts education. For others, they viewed their particular subject area to be linked in some way to the cultivation of a Christian worldview.

A theology lecturer explained, ‘Some universities use the term “liberal arts,” but they just mean MKDU. But here it arises from Christian worldview.’ He said that he hoped an outcome of this education would be ‘not legalistic but true Christians.’ Another theology lecturer commented that liberal arts has specific aims with regard to students: ‘students must change character; students come to know God; students believe, and their faith grows.’ This lecturer indicated that in order to achieve these aims, he would start classes with ‘a spiritual song and devotion and testimony – this all happens before the main material.’ Another theology lecturer said that

liberal arts aims to ‘give fundamental thinking about the Christian faith.’

A number of lecturers spoke about their ideal graduate profile in religious terms. One lecturer commented that graduates of the liberal arts program ‘should know what it means to serve, to love, to be Christ-like.’ She said that she appreciated being in an educational institution ‘that is trying to share the good news.’ A theology lecturer commented, ‘I hope that [graduates] are Christians who know God’s calling for them in all of life.’

Integrity. A third emphasis among the lecturers’ perspectives on the definition and aims of liberal arts was *integrity*. This seemed to be the most common emphasis of the three. In this context, the word ‘integrity’ does not refer to moral wholeness but to the wholeness of the educational program of formation. In particular, this emphasis evidences a tendency to understand liberal arts as cultivating an integrated vision of Christian faith and secular vocation. It is different to the emphasis on spirituality, because it sees liberal arts not as cultivating Christians *per se*, but as cultivating lawyers, doctors, designers, managers, or scientists who have combined, as these lecturers would commonly say, ‘faith and science.’ This conception of liberal arts again squares with Bog and Van der Wende’s ‘social-moral aims,’ but with greater attention to societal benefits than those who held to an emphasis on spirituality. It also coheres with the second and third of Chopp’s foundations: ‘moral and civil character, and using knowledge to improve the world.’

This emphasis was particularly (but certainly not exclusively) evident among those in the Philosophy department, and those who pointed to the influence of Catholic education upon their thinking. Whereas lecturers who held to a ‘spirituality’ emphasis generally expressed their educational aims in religious terms, lecturers who held to an ‘integrity’ emphasis generally expressed their aims in social terms: they wanted to produce graduates whose God-honouring excellence in their field would change society.

One philosophy lecturer with a Catholic background commented that the intended ‘output of liberal arts is not clever people, but holistic people.’ Another lecturer, who emphasised the influence of his Catholic seminary training on his understanding, said that liberal arts is ‘education for the development of self... the holistic integrity of self – not just the intellectual aspect.’ Another lecturer, who also emphasised the impact of his Catholic seminary education, said, ‘I am very proud that in [the faculty of liberal arts] we prioritise the connection of science and faith.’

A critical thinking lecturer, who likewise mentioned the influence of his Catholicism on his understanding, made a comment that illustrates the emphasis on societal benefits that is a feature of this category, as distinct from the ‘spirituality’ category: ‘We need to be aware we are training future leaders.... Even those who remain Muslim can be well prepared as leaders, with prejudices removed.’

A lecturer in theology (who did not come from a Catholic background) commented that when he first encountered liberal arts (by coming to University X as a lecturer), he assumed it was the same as MKDU, but subsequently came to see it as being different: ‘It shows [students] how to solve, how to integrate, from a Christian worldview.’ This lecturer said that ‘we need to change the next generation so that they are able to integrate personal belief or worldview with education.’

Another lecturer in theology, who likewise had not heard of liberal arts before coming to University X, differentiated liberal arts from MKDU by using the category of integration: ‘liberal arts tries to integrate many things.... We have Christian worldview, that integrates everything.’ A different lecturer in theology used similar terminology: ‘Liberal arts lays a foundation and helps them to think integratively, seeing faith, life, work, and value together.’ A lecturer in language said that liberal arts is ‘one method for teaching subjects to integrate with a Christian worldview.’

It should be recognised that these three different emphases, on proficiency, on spirituality, and on integrity, should not be thought

of as sharp demarcations. They are emphases rather than discrete groupings. Only a few lecturers expressed perspectives that seemed exclusively marked by one of the three categorisations. Given this qualification, though, these categories do seem to represent useful accounts of the different perspectives that could be found among the group.

Commonalities

As well as the differences of emphasis discussed above, two commonalities of perspective are worth noting. These were held by most lecturers, regardless of their categorisation above. These commonalities of perspective could particularly be seen in comments made by lecturers about their frustrations or hopes for the future of the faculty. These comments imply certain assumptions about liberal arts education, even if these assumptions were not deliberately articulated. Two such assumptions worth considering are the value of interaction in liberal arts education, and the value of cooperation in liberal arts education.

Value of Interaction. Almost all of the lecturers made some comment about class sizes, time allocation, and the need to connect with students. Most lecturers were concerned that class sizes were too big, and time commitments were too pressured, for lecturers to be able to get to know students and help to tailor their learning or cultivate their character. Many lecturers appeared to find this a major struggle, threatening their sense of job satisfaction.

One lecturer said that ‘teachers must keep close to the students.’ Another said, ‘I try to share stories and connect to people. If we only teach, they will forget.’ One lecturer in philosophy was explicit about the link between interaction and liberal arts education in particular: ‘liberal education is more effective with smaller classes.’ Another lecturer said that the ideal would be to ‘promote dialogue between people, and teach personally if there are difficulties.’

But most lecturers said that this sort of ideal was not being met. One lecturer commented, ‘Large classes are a problem... I once had 170

in a class... It is difficult to help them.’ Another said, ‘We are too busy, with too little time with students – not enough time to get to know them.’ One lecturer in language was adamant: ‘The process of learning must prepare students in smaller classes, because they cannot learn in large classes.’ A complaint from a theology lecturer echoed the perspectives of numerous other lecturers: ‘Our campus is like a business. But education should be relational!’

These comments from lecturers imply the conviction that liberal arts education (and perhaps education in general) requires genuine interaction between lecturers and students in order to be properly fruitful. Lecturers were generally very dissatisfied with the experience of mass lectures, and wanted to have a more personal influence upon their students. While only some of the lecturers explicitly articulated this as a particular feature of *liberal arts* education, it is clear that the great majority of the lecturers held personal interaction to be an educational value that was necessary in their faculty.

Value of Cooperation. A significant number of lecturers commented that they wished to see improved unity or cooperation, at two distinct levels. One level was between different members of the faculty and their respective subject areas: lecturers wanted to see a commonality of purpose throughout the faculty of liberal arts, expressed in a clearer relationship and involvement between the different departments of Theology, Philosophy, and Language. The other level was the university as a whole: lecturers wanted liberal arts to have an integral place within the university’s vision of education, receiving respect and appreciation by the other faculties.

One lecturer lamented, ‘People in [this faculty] are not very connected. [We need to] take time to share about each lecturer’s field, so we can share knowledge.’ A theology lecturer complained, ‘Not only are there students who don’t understand, but most lecturers don’t teach from a Christian worldview.... We should share from one perspective what we want to be taught.’ Another theology lecturer expressed a similar view: ‘some lecturers come from secular backgrounds and don’t share the vision.... [We need

to] consolidate lecturers, to see a common vision.’ Another lecturer said:

Lecturers must learn about liberal arts as a whole. At the moment, I feel they just focus on their own course, not perceiving the bigger picture. We must use communication to make relationships until they understand. We need group discussion. If they [understand] about liberal arts, they will have a sense of belonging, which will help students.

In relation to the level of the university as a whole, one lecturer commented, ‘[Our faculty] could be better integrated with other fields of study, and we must learn more.’ Another lecturer said:

[We need] integration between our department and others. We seem to be separated. We need to work together. We can’t limit [Christian] worldview to the faculty of liberal arts – it needs to pervade.... Also I want to improve perceptions of liberal arts among other departments and students – they think liberal arts is not as important.... We need to be better unified.

These comments from lecturers imply the conviction that liberal arts ought to be a unified body of mutually contributing components, together serving a broader educational purpose. Again, this was not explicitly articulated as a feature of *liberal arts* by most lecturers, but this conviction appears to underlie many of their stated concerns.

Conclusion

The theory that has been generated in this essay could be summarised as follows: liberal arts lecturers at University X generally hold to at least one of three main emphases: (1) that liberal arts is supplementary education aimed at general proficiency in foundational knowledge and academic skills; (2) that liberal arts is education that grounds students in a spirituality marked by a Christian worldview; or, most prominently, (3) that liberal arts is education that promotes the integrity of Christian faith and secular vocation. They generally view liberal arts education as being best conducted in settings where active interaction between students and

lecturers is optimised, and where cooperation between faculty members, subject areas, and specialisations is prioritised.

Of course, a study of the perspectives of lecturers does not exhaustively explain liberal arts even at this one university. Nevertheless, in the enactment of educational curricula, teachers or lecturers play a key role (Ledger et al 2015). Their perspectives are therefore worth appreciating. In this way, the picture that has been built up here contributes to a growing body of literature that attempts to understand liberal arts in Asian settings.

This is of interest in its own right, but educators will also be curious to know how the theory generated about this distinctively Indonesian case study might have implications for other settings. Some elements of the Indonesian setting will not be directly applicable in other parts of Asia, let alone the rest of the world. Most notably, this would include the specific context of MKDU. However, other countries do also have their own various heritages of national general education, and this study demonstrates that attention to such contexts will be illuminative in attempting to understand the perspectives of lecturers.

Certain other features of this study are more directly comparable to different settings within Asia and beyond. One is the structure of liberal arts as a stream that occurs alongside a specialised degree. This structure was assumed to be normal by most of the lecturers in this study, given the relative lack of awareness of other models. The lack of direct access to other models of liberal arts will be a feature of many other lecturers in liberal arts departments throughout Asia, and should be expected to influence lecturers' perspectives. The corollary is that lecturers will be particularly open to influence from voices and experiences in their own institution.

Another feature that will find resonance beyond this Indonesian university is the important role of Christianity in shaping lecturers' understanding of the definition and aims of liberal arts. This can be seen both in the influence of Roman Catholic heritage on certain lecturers' assumptions, and in this Christian university's conviction

that the cultivation of foundational Christian Worldview takes place particularly through the faculty of liberal arts. Given that liberal arts in Asia often takes places in settings historically impacted by Christianity, this should be recognised as a broadly important influence on lecturers' perspectives.

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