

Higher education enhances our way of life

In his State of the Union address, President Barack Obama called for higher education to be more "accountable."

Some interpreted his remarks as advocating "gainful employment" as the standard by which we should gauge institutional efficacy.

This would not, however, be in our nation's best interest.

To be clear, colleges and universities have an inherent obligation to provide students with accurate and trustworthy information about their prospects for finding a suitable job in their selected field.

Still, students should be encouraged to follow their dreams as much as possible when choosing a major. It is difficult to be successful if you do not have a passion for the profession you are preparing to enter.

The goal of higher education should never be to prepare an individual for a specific career in a specific discipline. This approach shortchanges the true value of the learning process and will not serve to enhance our culture or way of life.

Moreover, preparing students

for occupations (or entire industries) that may not even exist in the coming decades makes absolutely no sense.

In addition to relevant knowledge and skills, education should endow students with fundamental problem-solving and decision-making strategies that will allow them to effectively negotiate a rapidly evolving global environment.

There is little disagreement that society will increasingly need graduates who have a solid background in science and engineering. What is less understood – yet no less important – is that we will also need graduates with extensive exposure to the humanities.

If colleges and universities do not emphasize literature, languages, philosophy, and the arts at the same intensity as chemistry, biology and physics, everything human civilization has achieved is in danger of being lost.

Einstein once famously said: "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

Once again, he was ahead of his time.

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