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Character Scholarship Community



*Welcome to our eleventh edition of "The Academic Journal," a bimonthly bulletin in which you can read about MCA's educational philosophy, instructional methodology, and the various viewpoints and positions of our faculty, staff, students, and families.*

## Education and the Pursuit of Happiness

From almost the beginning of their school years, our students know that our forefathers were passionate about "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Thomas Jefferson, who not only penned those famous words borrowed from John Locke, but also founded the University of Virginia, had this to say about education in the new America: "I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness."

While Jefferson connects knowledge to the pursuit of happiness, a few moments in front of the television will reveal the current cultural definition of such a pursuit. Advertisers try their best to convince us that happiness lies in the "things" we can accrue, whether or not we can afford them. Is this the pursuit the founders envisioned? Millennium's vision statement also mentions pursuit, but rather than encouraging our students to pursue happiness, we are committed to encouraging them to pursue "truth, goodness, and beauty." Could it be that the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty are one and the same, and that collectively they are the most important goal of education? Perhaps the greatest and longest-lasting happiness can be gained in finding truth to guide one's life, finding standards of goodness to define one's character, and finding beauty to fuel one's soul.

To speak of the pursuit of truth is no longer in vogue in our educational system. Speaking of this lack, Richard John Neuhaus says, "...Truth is a conversation stopper, it is suggested. I want to explore with you whether exactly the opposite is not the case—whether, in fact, the only conversation starter, and the only conversation sustainer that is worthy of human beings, is the question of truth...To be human is to seek the truth, and the quest for truth is a kind of open-ended adventure. It really is an excitement, and yes, a kind of delight, into an exploration that is never ended in life..." (Is There Life After Truth). Our students deserve to enter this rich and never-ending exploration, but unless they are working hard to discern the truth in any subject under study, they are reduced to gathering a mental database of information, which they may find useful, but not transformative. An Internet search may also yield such a plethora of information, but it lacks the dimension of an education delivered by adults who are passionate about the truth of their



subjects. Thinking well requires grappling with ideas, discussing views, and distilling one's own thoughts until arriving at a place of confidence in the truth. The pursuit of truth is a difficult task, but a rewarding one.

Without the pursuit of goodness, character development is a willy-nilly affair with one looking only inward for guidance in making moral decisions. Although making decisions based on sound ethical principles may be, once again, a matter of grappling with difficult ideas, the end result of the confidence in having "done the right thing" brings an abiding happiness whose pursuit is well worth the effort. We must tend well the moral character of our students, encouraging the pursuit of goodness at every turn in the path.

Is the pursuit of beauty entirely subjective, "in the eye of the beholder," or can we train young minds and souls to appreciate beauty in an objective way? Certainly, involvement in a strong fine arts program is an aid to the pursuit of beauty, but in a world with increasing noise and a continual diet of flashing images, it is essential to show our students how to enjoy the quiet beauty of everyday occurrences. Pointing to the soul-fueling beauty of a rosy sunrise, an emerging seedling, or a lingering chord can foster personal growth in ways that remain mysterious to us, but are so essential to human development.

As we enjoy the season of light in the midst of winter, let us think about the light that truth, goodness, and beauty bring to us, and let us take our young ones by the hand and help them pursue happiness by finding truth, goodness, and beauty. That will be an education, indeed.

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