

# TAKING THE PATH

## Is there a rationale for a Christian liberal arts education?

# LESS TRAVELLED

**I**N MALAYSIA, AN OVERSEAS HIGHER education usually means one pursued in a university in the UK, Australia or New Zealand. The United States, however, is well known for its liberal arts education which is credited for producing well-rounded graduates with good communication and critical thinking skills.

Not many Malaysians are familiar with liberal arts colleges, let alone Christian liberal arts colleges. In fact, most tend to associate “Christian” colleges with Bible colleges, seminaries and theological training.

But first, what is a liberal arts education?

Liberal arts is a four-year academic programme that offers a broad range of subjects from the sciences to humanities (such as history, music, arts and literature) designed to encourage students to read widely and acquire analytical and critical thinking skills. Students explore different courses in the first two years before deciding on a major in the third year.

BY A STAFF WRITER

A liberal arts college usually has a small enrolment (under 4,000) which means better class interaction (classes are smaller and faculty to student ratio is higher).

Many Malaysians have this perception that a “college” programme is not on par

Messiah College, fall in the same category – where students graduate with a degree after a four-year course.

But why consider a Christian liberal arts education?

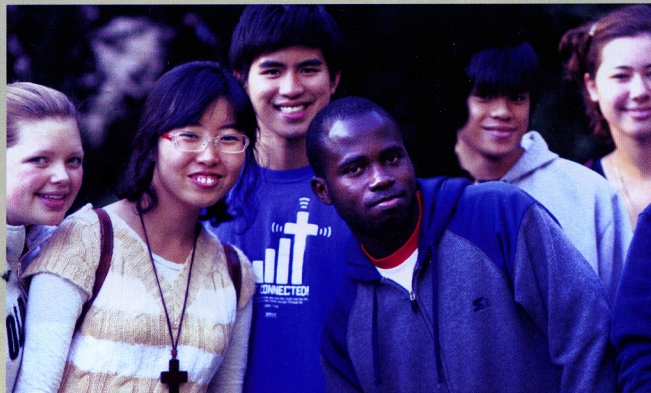
A Christian liberal arts education offers an added spiritual dimension to a normal liberal arts education. This will help to shape the identity of the Christian student as well as influence his life choices and decisions in his journey of faith.

Beyond the acquisition of knowledge, a Christian education develops character – the heart, mind and soul of the student. A Christ-centred education develops spiritual maturity. It helps him explore his faith and strengthens his walk with Christ. He also learns how to integrate scholarship with faith by tackling and interpreting issues of faith intelligently. His

understanding of and appreciation for the Bible deepens. Having matured, he is able to consider God’s call on his life and explore what it means to be a Christian in whatever academic discipline, mission, vocation, or service God has called him to.

Christian colleges also have a strong culture of mentoring – committed Christian professors seek to be partners with their students in their spiritual journey. In addition, scholarships and financial aid are often offered, thus making Christian education more affordable.

When considering a Christian liberal arts college, it is advisable to check the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) website for more information. Although there are about 900 institutions of higher learning in the US which claim “Christian” affiliation, only 111 have qualified as members of the CCCU, which only admits members which are intentionally Christ-centred in their faith mission. **ab**



International students in the US benefit from a well-rounded liberal arts education

with that of a “university” without realising that in the US, they both refer to a four-year undergraduate college education. Thus big research universities like Princeton, Yale and Harvard and liberal arts colleges, like

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