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10-24-2013

The case for the residential liberal arts, Part II: Working alone versus working together

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Recommended Citation

Hemesath M. 2013 Oct 24. The case for the residential liberal arts, Part II: Working alone versus working together [blog]. Quad 136. [Accessed 2017 Feb 9]. <http://blogs.csbsju.edu/mhemesath/2013/10/24/the-case-for-residential-liberal-arts-part-ii-working-alone-versus-working-together/>.

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Quad 136

The Case for Residential Liberal Arts, Part II: Working Alone Versus Working Together

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The Case for Residential Liberal Arts, Part II: Working Alone Versus Working Together

Nearly a year ago newly appointed Yahoo CEO Marissa Meyer banned telecommuting. Just recently Hewlett-Packard CEO Meg Whitman put a similar policy in place. Both policies were presumably designed to increase productivity and innovation in the workplace by having individuals working in proximity and in groups. A Marketplace [interview](#) with Harvard Business School Professor Nancy Koehn explores this hypothesis. Koehn argues that, “Not all work is meant to be done alone. A lot of work — the best work, often — is done with others in serious pursuit, and often in a place where everyone meets to do it.”

If this hypothesis about the benefits of proximity and group work is correct, I think it makes a strong case for the benefits of a residential, liberal arts experience, which emphasizes learning together. Not only does a lot of learning take place in group settings like classrooms or labs, but also informally in libraries, learning commons, dormitories and study groups. And this list does not begin to touch on the learning that takes place in extra-curricular settings like athletic teams or music groups. Furthermore, in the process of learning academic content in a residential setting, students also learn skills like how to work closely with others, how to negotiate group dynamics and how to efficiently take advantage of different skill sets among individuals.

Can you tell I am a fan of the residential, liberal arts experience?

October 24th, 2013 | Categories: [Higher Education](#) | Tags: [Case for Residential Liberal Arts](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).