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## Minnesota State University, Moorhead and the liberal arts

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## Quad 136

### Minnesota State University, Moorhead and the Liberal Arts

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## Minnesota State University, Moorhead and the Liberal Arts



Minnesota State University, Moorhead has been in the [news](#) recently. MSU, Moorhead, part of the MnSCU system, is facing a \$5 million budget deficit and is considering significant cutbacks across many departments, though the majority of the most vulnerable departments include classic liberal arts departments like music, physics, history, political science, theater, English and foreign languages.

This story has also drawn some national attention, as well. Writing in [Slate](#), Rebecca Schuman argues that these cuts are designed get rid of tenured faculty and create a new vision of a university that “is not a university at all. It is a ghost town with quads and a gourmet cafeteria, one that consists of amenities, sports, and administrators—but no faculty.” (I’d note that Schuman’s article seems clearly written by someone who has never had to

grapple with balancing a college budget.) Needless to say that administrators and even some faculty leaders in Moorhead dispute the [Slate](#) characterization of the situation.

The bigger issue for higher education is the future role of the liberal arts. What seems to be happening in Moorhead and [other places around the country](#) is a decreasing interest in classic liberal arts programs in light of challenges in the job market. Students and their parents are understandably concerned about employability and the returns on a college education. This nervousness can lead students to opt for (apparently) more marketable majors and lead to declining interest in the liberal arts, even when choosing electives.

While student choices in a slow economy are certainly understandable, they may well be short-sighted. For those who still have a strong faith in the value and power of the liberal arts, it is incumbent upon us to re-double our efforts to remind students of the important skills such as critical thinking, clear writing, oral communication, the ability to synthesize material across disciplines, etc. that are at the heart of a great liberal arts education. Furthermore, in an ever changing world, liberal arts can provide students with a flexibility and adaptability that is crucial over the course of a professional career. The best college education is not for that first job but for a lifetime.

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## About the

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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](#).