

In this talk, I will present some observations on, and comparisons between, the *raison d'être* and aims of the liberal arts at military academies, and how the inclusion of such subjects are framed. I will begin by framing my own interest in this topic by anchoring it in a recent teaching experience, and then move on to point to how the humanities are taught in the US and France in order to ask questions about what a liberal arts curriculum can do for a future officer.

Last year, I decided to design a debate-like task where the winner advanced to the next round of a student-led debate, until a final winner could be crowned. The topics centered on the military profession and military education, where the debaters had to take a stand for one side, regardless of personal conviction. Some examples include “it is reasonable to expect military personnel to sacrifice family time and free time for the sake of their job” and “it should be compulsory to do a year of service after high school, either in conscription, or another equivalent civilian training (health care, aid work, environmental education etc.).

When I wrote these questions, I was, and still am, deeply interested in the question of what officers do, and should, study. Thus, I threw my students a curveball statement: “The OP and HOP should include more courses in the humanities.” I wanted to know how the students argued for and against this statement: what they understood “the humanities” to be, and what they thought the humanities could, or could not, add to their education.

In Sweden, aspects of liberal arts education were removed, together with military technology, when a process of academization occurred late last century. “Military science” became, perhaps somewhat accidentally or hurriedly, a narrowly defined subject with little room for inquiries and readings that did not strictly apply to the officer’s future tasks and challenges. In other countries, however, the humanities have continued to be embraced to a much larger extent, and counts, among other things, as being constitutional to that creativity and intellectual agility that is often described as desirable in an officer.

After looking at examples of how the humanities are taught at military academies in the USA (literature, philosophy) and France (literature, philosophy, geography, history), I will give examples of how the liberal arts are framed in order to connect the “liberal” and “human” to the art of war, such as the following from a recent initiative to create a liberal arts center at West Point:

High-impact research and robust public engagement will demonstrate to the public and to our stakeholders the vitality and importance of West Point’s broad liberal arts education to understanding the human dimension of warfare. A Humanities Center is essential if West Point is to keep pace and achieve excellence. There will be four component programs organized around a theme, designed to facilitate interdisciplinary investigation. Examples include “the city,” “borders,” “trust,” and “intelligence.”

In addition, there is a substantial amount of money connected to the center, including generous scholarships for students, workshop, conferences, and guest speakers, pointing to the strength and conviction behind the initiative.

Tradition counts for a great deal when it comes to how nations organize their educational institutions, as does the size and budget of the military and its adjoining military academies. In America, liberal arts came to its own later than one may think: in a way, the humanities

have travelled in the opposite direction there, with its popularity increasing since the middle of the last century. But what is there to gain from inviting the humanities into the military curriculum, and what can, and should, the humanities *not* do? In this paper and any discussion afterwards, I hope to raise the question of what the liberal arts can do for future military leaders, and how we might achieve a reintroduction of the humanities in institutions that have, for a host of reasons, a narrow idea of the subjects that should be included in a given curriculum.

I now want to return to that classroom debate that I discussed earlier. A particularly persuasive student was declared winner after having argued, for several rounds of debate, for the importance of the humanities, while all the way understanding “the humanities” to mean, as it was revealed, “humanitarian law”. Let us make an effort to level the international playing field by reintroducing the humanities to a Nordic military educational context.