Introduction
For centuries, in fact, since Socrates, higher education has been developing the intellectual arts in students; in particular, the complex development of wisdom. Over time we seem to be drifting away from the classical purposes of higher education; trading what has been criticized as the ambiguity of liberal arts education for the pragmatic, career-focused professional education. The pursuit of this type of education comes, in part, from a society that demands cost-benefit evaluation, and also in a new generation shaped by instant gratification. However, this drift comes at a cost. In this instance, the evolving redefinition of the purposes of higher education obscures the importance of what liberal arts education offers.

This session presents a conceptual framework for the definition of liberal arts education as well as the theoretical development of wisdom and citizenship in college students. This paper argues that liberal arts education must be understood for its unique contribution to the development of students and in turn, to society at large. It challenges institutions to regard the purposes and outcomes of liberal arts education as critical to our modern society.

Liberal Arts Education Definition

1. A need for definition
To begin this discussion, it is important to begin with a definition of liberal arts education (LAE). Unfortunately, the term LAE has been used to mean many different things, often encompassing all things that are good about higher education without regard for evidence to show many of these relationships. Institutions define their own version of LAE, often based on curriculum requirements. Alumni describe LAE in terms of broad-reaching idealistic benefits that are bathed in the halo of their experience. What definition remains is nebulous and glowing with reflection. The task of creating a focused definition for LAE demands re-evaluation of the classic utility of higher education in the 21st century society.

2. A focused definition
The definition of liberal arts education used in this session is not dependent upon curriculum; rather it outlines the conditions and factors that must co-exist to support the outcomes of liberal arts education: wisdom and citizenship. (see http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/definition/index.htm)

- An institutional ethos and tradition which places a greater value on developing a set of intellectual arts, than professional or vocational skills.
- Curricular and environmental structures that work in combination to create coherence and integrity in students' intellectual experiences.
- An institutional ethos and tradition which places a strong value on student-student and student-faculty interactions both in and out of the classroom.

3. Finding a testable definition
This working definition of liberal arts education establishes an initial place to find evidence for the relationship between campus conditions and the development of wisdom and citizenship. This is particularly important because, while curriculum may often be a vehicle for delivering liberal arts education, it is not sufficient, in itself for the development of complex intellectual arts. Because this work is in its infancy, the testability of this definition is critical. Initial findings of Pascarella, Crue, Wolniak, and Blaich (2003) demonstrate that institutions with liberal arts education conditions develop wisdom and citizenship

Developing Wisdom and Citizenship

1. Complex nature of wisdom
The theoretical underpinnings of wisdom development flow from the work of Baxter Magolda and King (in press). They suggest that self-authorship—wisdom—is the product of the critical interdependence of three aspects of student development: cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal development. Together, these factors result in an integration of learning that affects perspective and
sense of self. Intellectual knowing alone is not sufficient. Wisdom requires self-knowing in relationship to others in addition to the coupling of effective reasoning, reflection, and perspective. This paper argues that liberal arts education conditions support this rich and complex development during college years and are identifiable.

2. Citizenship as Practical Wisdom
Because citizenship is considered here to be the evidence of wisdom, it is based on the open-mindedness, self-understanding, and effective reasoning. The action of wisdom juxtaposes one's own values and perspectives to those of public good. Citizenship is the responsible civic engagement prompted by such considerations.

Discussion
Institutions of higher education that seek to contribute to society should consider the drift that has taken place toward professional education. This session intends to question the trend to devalue liberal arts education that exists at so many institutions. Does the value of liberal arts education ring true for our institutions? Does it ring true for our societies? This discussion presents sound reasoning and sites initial results regarding the outcomes and conditions of liberal arts education. This topic is worthy of discussion and debate. Without regard, liberal arts education is being given a back seat to other educational goals. If we expect new generations of wisdom and citizenship to flourish, institutions must consider whether supportive conditions for their development exist.

References