An Overarching Approach to Life

Beloit Alumni on Practicing the Liberal Arts

Spring 2012 Edition
Cover photos by Cassie Swanson and David Birdwell’94
Cover photos (clockwise from upper left): Steve Cohen’75 and Mary Mikva’74 with students, KC Johnson’89, Jeff Jensen’82, Lori Rhoades’11, and Jon Urish’96 with students.

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A very warm welcome to Beloit College!

This booklet was born of the notion that the stories of those who have gone before you might help you to imagine your own future, and thus to avail yourself of the many opportunities available to you right now. As the stories in this collection demonstrate, however, our paths before, during, and after Beloit are extraordinarily diverse, wide-ranging, and unpredictable. You haven’t come to Beloit to become a criminal defense attorney, a correspondent for People magazine, or a bureaucrat at the U.S. Senate, but neither did the alumni whose stories are featured here. Life is surprising—and if you’re prepared to take advantage of the serendipitous circumstances that come your way, you’ll find your path fulfilling.

And that’s the great strength of a Beloit education. It prepares you for life, not simply for a specific job or career. You’ll see that the stories in this booklet share common themes that, taken together, provide a succinct description of what a Beloit education is all about: stimulating, well-rounded, and experience-rich coursework; an exploratory environment in which to discover and develop your most passionate interests; and the flexibility of mind to approach diverse challenges from multiple perspectives. We call that practicing the liberal arts.

We are grateful to the nine alumni whose stories appear in the pages that follow. We thank Todd Hansen, Jeff Jensen, and Stacy Kern-Scheerer for writing to you about their experiences. Their accounts provide compelling first-person testimony to the excitement of a life informed by the ongoing practice of the liberal arts. Nicole Downey, Greg Hanrahan, Andrea Johnson, Catherine Nolan, Veronica Siehl, and Sarah Van Niewaal shared their stories with first-year students in the fall of 2011. We are indebted both to these alumni and to the students (Kate Atkinson, Marlee Breunig, Andrei Domapias, Emily Dorjath, Jessica Vogel and Anna Wenzel) who interviewed them and distilled their diverse experiences into the narratives you will read here. Finally, we appreciate the invaluable assistance of Susan Kasten and Cassie Swanson in editing and compiling this booklet.

We wish you much fun and success as you explore your interests and pursue your passions here. And we look forward to hearing your story, too!

Natalie & Ruth

Natalie Gummer
Academic Director, Initiatives Program
Associate Professor, Philosophy & Religious Studies

Ruth Vater’05
Senior Director, Alumni & Parent Relations
Making Connections, Taking Action: Beloit in the First Person
The first time I set foot on Beloit’s campus was when I was dropped off for my first year. I have never been able to answer why I chose to attend a school I had never seen before—and I have been asked that question often—but I do believe it was the first lesson Beloit was to teach me. Because when my family left me on my own there, I started on my way to figuring things out.

It’s often said that at Beloit, you learn “how to learn,” but that was only part of it to me. I think the value is that I learned “how to do.”

When I look back at the three years and nine months from that first day until commencement, I’m often amazed—and grateful—at all of the times I was “dropped off” with no blueprints and only my own expectations. I was a radio show host and news reporter. An actor. An international traveler during a semester in Glasgow. A newspaper columnist. A sports editor. An organic chemist (well, only for about six weeks, but still …). A peer counselor. A computer programmer. I even worked at McDonald’s for two months as part of my senior thesis.

There were two things that I never was: I was never bored. And I was never unhappy. At least that’s how I remember it. What I remember is that I was thrilled. I would have never imagined how well I would respond to the opportunity to figure things out with professors who guided me on what to do but, importantly, did not tell me how to do them.

When I left Beloit, I spent the next seven years at a two-person public relations agency. I had been trained perfectly for it. Every time I answered the phone, there was a new challenge. I was a speechwriter. A video director. An event planner. A marketer. A journalist. An accountant. A counselor. I was regularly working on different projects for different people in different industries. I even had McDonald’s as a client.

Five years ago, I started my own agency with a friend. I guide my team with the simple mantra I learned at Beloit: Always try something you haven’t done before and spend your energy on making your work brilliant. We’ll know if it works and, if it’s not right yet, we’ll figure it out together. So far, we have done pretty well.

But the most important part about my Beloit liberal arts education is that when I was there I learned what I loved to do—write, try new things, and spend time with the good friends I made there. And, for the most part, that’s pretty much what I’m still doing now.
Real People, Real Problems
Jeffrey W. Jensen’82

Anyone who spends time at receptions or cocktail parties—as most lawyers do—has a repertoire of rehearsed lines. Two of my own favorites are, “Law school is a semester’s worth of material spread out over three years’ worth of tuition,” and, “I learned more in my first month of practicing law than I learned in three years of law school.”

If there happens to be a law professor in the crowd, the retort will be, “Over those three years, my friend, we teach you to think like a lawyer.”

Is this true? Law school is three years of reading case law, identifying the legal issue involved, and memorizing the court’s holding on that issue. Then, one must be prepared to off-load all of these holdings into a blue book at the final exam. Law school rewards those who read carefully, memorize well, and enjoy reciting the right answer. But is this how successful lawyers really think?

When a new client sits down in my office, she begins by telling me her story, and then she asks a question. The question is not, “What is the right answer?” The question is, “Can you help me?” If I cannot help this person solve her problem, then I will not get paid. In other words, to think like a successful lawyer (i.e., one who gets paid) one needs to think not necessarily in terms of getting the right answer; rather, one must think in terms of solving problems. Helping this person might mean trying the case to a jury; it might mean filing a persuasive brief; it might mean persuading her to plead guilty; or it might mean just listening to the client. If you cannot assure this person that you can help her, you will not be hired. This requires far more expertise than simply the memorization of case holdings. It requires extraordinary intellectual diversity and flexibility. During the course of a day, then, thinking like a successful lawyer means thinking like a salesman, like a psychologist, like an author, like a cop, like an accountant, like a marketing executive, like an IT professional, and, at times, also like an expert in the law.

Law school did not teach me to think like a successful lawyer. To the extent that it might be said that I think like a successful lawyer, it is due almost wholly to the liberal arts education I received at Beloit College. My liberal arts education developed in me an ability to rationally and critically assess a problem; and also the general knowledge and intellectual diversity necessary to develop a unique solution to the problem. Law school provided me with one tool (i.e., the law). Beloit College provided me with the ability to use this tool—and many other tools—to solve real problems for real people. This is the best way I know to get paid.
An Overarching Approach to Living
Stacy Kern-Scheerer’00

I admit that I went through a fair amount of hand-wringing over how exactly to write to you about practicing the liberal arts. After considering numerous approaches, ranging from the philosophical to the über-pragmatic, I decided to step back, organize my thoughts, and simply ask, “OK, what did I do yesterday?” First I went to work at the U.S. Senate Office of the Legislative Counsel. Around lunchtime I ran to the Chinese consulate to get a visa for an upcoming trip to China. After work I went to see a national ballet company perform. After thinking it through, I realized that yesterday: 1) was a great day, and 2) I practiced the liberal arts left and right.

Let’s start with work. My job is to write legislation for senators. I don’t work for any particular senator or party; my position is nonpartisan. I listen when a senate staffer comes to me to explain a policy sought by his or her boss. After I listen, I ask questions that help me better understand the policy, in order to accurately write the legal language effectuating the intent. I craft the legislation to amend the law where needed, taking care to be as clear and organized as possible. A Beloit College liberal arts education emphasizes listening to and understanding different viewpoints, clearly articulating ideas, and excellence in writing. These are skills I use every day in my work.

And then the Chinese consulate. My husband (also a Beloiter) and I are planning a trip to China. Why? Because we don’t really know that much about China, and neither of us has traveled there before. With all the China-related books lying around our house, it looks like we are taking a class on the country. But this is another way we practice our liberal arts education in our lives: We strive to keep learning, to take interest in other cultures and ways of living, and then act upon that interest.

And finally, the ballet. I have had a passion for dance most of my life. The liberal arts education at Beloit encouraged both the artist and the scholar in me. Although I am not an artist by profession now, I practice the liberal arts by supporting and appreciating the arts whenever I can. I hope that Beloit teaches you, as it did me, that practicing the liberal arts is not just about what you do to earn a living, it is an overarching approach to living your life.
Let me clarify that yesterday was not a run-of-the-mill day. I don’t usually take an hour off in the middle of the workday to further a cross-cultural experience, and it is not every weekend I get to see an excellent ballet company. It just so happens that these particular illustrations of practicing the liberal arts came together yesterday, and because of my liberal arts education, I am able to draw connections between seemingly different ideas and actions: drafting legislation, going to China, and watching the ballet.
Looking Back, Looking Forward: First-years and Alumni Face-to-Face
“The doors are wide open and there are a lot of things I can see myself doing,” says Veronica Siehl’06. Although still young and freshly out of graduate school, Veronica has strived to live a life open to as many opportunities as possible.

The foundation for this broad mindset was developed at Beloit, where she quickly realized the variety of subject areas that interested her and how uncertain she was of what her major would be. While the majority of her friends stayed close to home after high school and attended the University of Michigan, Veronica decided to broaden her horizons and to apply to liberal arts schools in the Midwest. She describes her first moments away from home as challenging, but fun. Beloit was a place where she felt she could explore various subject areas. At one point she considered majoring in English, but she eventually declared herself a psychology major at the beginning of her sophomore year. Ultimately, however, she switched her major to studio art.

“You evolve. Oftentimes you meet a great professor,” she says of her change of heart. For Veronica, that professor was Scott Espeseth, an assistant professor of art. While she was always extremely involved in photography classes, she credits Espeseth with introducing her to printmaking. “The biggest surprise was when I switched my major to studio art. I’d done art in high school, but thought I wasn’t talented enough.” Class visits to print exhibits at art galleries and museums in Madison not only affirmed her interests in art, but also helped her realize there was a place for her in this field.

From that point on, Veronica pursued an intensive study of studio arts. She recalls actively participating in Art Club, taking various dance classes ranging from ballroom to belly-dancing, working at Gallery ABBA, and studying art history and theatre abroad in Florence and London.

Although many students at Beloit pursued other interests after college, Veronica’s passion for the arts led her to continue exploring deeper into her field. Initially, she viewed art as a hobby rather than an endeavor, but she says she has developed a broad spectrum of artistic styles and
Looking Back, Looking Forward: First-Years and Alumni Face-to-Face

skills. Examples of these explorations include using the sun to produce cyanotypes, using the process of intaglio to produce prints, and exhibiting silk-screen silhouetted self-portraits. Veronica studied printmaking at the University of Tennessee and graduated in 2010 with her Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art.

Even though five years have passed since leaving Beloit, Veronica is still a strong advocate of a liberal arts education. She describes it as having a series of “aha” moments and making connections between seemingly unrelated subjects. “That’s the beauty of it,” she says. Reflecting back on her own Beloit experience, Veronica acknowledges the great changes in her personal philosophy on art and the impact Beloit has had on expanding her worldview. Rather than having a specific template for each artistic project she undertakes, she has learned to be creative and use the resources available to her. While describing her exploration with fabric and maintaining a liberal mindset, Veronica explains how her initial interest in psychology benefitted her in viewing fabric as a second skin and challenging her to address the question of what makes us who we are.

Besides the obvious impact on her pursuit of the studio arts and philosophy on approaching new learning experiences, Veronica feels that the liberal arts education has also simply opened up her opportunities and provided new connections. “My friends are all over the world and it’s wonderful to stay in touch and hear about their experiences. My own travels abroad both during and after Beloit have greatly influenced my practice of art making. I constantly look to various cultural traditions while making a body of work,” she says.

Although Veronica has now finished up her time at Beloit and at graduate school, she continues to keep her options open and strives to learn more. She keeps in touch with friends living in Romania and around the United States, and she plans to move to Seattle shortly to pursue an art career. Although she feels she could’ve double-majored in psychology and studio art while at Beloit, she continues to study the works of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Bruno Bettelheim and incorporates psychological elements such as Jungian archetypes into her artwork. For now though, Veronica’s options are wide open, with a variety of possible opportunities—teaching, artists residencies, museums—in her near future.
Experimenting in the Giant Playpen
Catherine Nolan’71
by Andrei Domapias’15

During the late ’60s and early ’70s, a period of protests, counterculture, and the Vietnam War, it must have been a very interesting time to go to Beloit College. Speaking with a French accent from spending most of her life in France, Catherine Nolan’71 says the current events of her time were important, but not the only things that affected her at Beloit. Her education was pivotal. It was about the free exchange of ideas and the importance of intellectual exploration.

For Catherine, now a Paris-based correspondent for People magazine, Beloit was intellectually varied and eclectic under what used to be a curriculum requiring “common courses,” designed to expose students to general and interdisciplinary fields and taught to students living in close proximity in residence halls.

With the common courses, Catherine was free to explore and participate in discourse about the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, even at a time of great social anxiety regarding communism.

The classes she took ranged from religion to art to population biology and to a class that focused solely on the writings of Immanuel Kant. “Beloit informed me on every level because there was both the academic and experiential side,” she says. “Plurality is a good word for it because you didn’t have to exclude things. You could incorporate. It was like being in a giant playpen and being given all these things that you could experiment with.”

What really piqued her interest, however, was sociology. Despite also having interests in literature and psychology, she was immediately drawn to sociology and her professor, Dr. Summers, who exhibited a passion for understanding the underlying principles of society and the human condition.

“It wasn’t just about learning the rules,” Catherine says of Beloit. “It was also about the history, the metaphysics. It was about stepping back and looking at the bigger picture.”
Summers helped Catherine secure a place at Harvard Divinity School through a Rockefeller Fellowship. She remained there for one year before being invited by her mother to return to Paris, France, where Catherine was born and spent her childhood.

Today, she still maintains a residence in Paris and a sense of flexibility in her life as a freelance journalist, editor, and translator. What she learned at Beloit has been advantageous during a 20-year career as a journalist. “My introduction to a career in journalism was this very liberal arts attitude of, ‘Sure, I’ll do it for a while,’” she says. It turns out that her career has lasted more than two decades. She attributes her success to wide-ranging interests, which she says journalists must have, especially when confronted with topics ranging from celebrity gossip to a medical scandal with very human implications.

The flexibility at Beloit—not only in academics but also in the potential for personal development—facilitated her drive for experimentation that continues today. She also maintains a sense of responsibility that she learned at Beloit as a citizen of the world, which propelled her to work for such organizations as UNESCO, in addition to her career in journalism. From the perspective of the liberal arts in practice, Catherine Nolan is a success story. With her education at Beloit, she has had a long and fruitful career, exploring and experimenting as a journalist, but also as a human being.

The single most important advice she would offer entering students? “You don’t have to choose a major right away,” she says. “This is the big chance for you to explore and play and know that almost nothing you do here will be irreversible. Keep in mind that, eventually, you will have to leave this little paradise.”
Andrea Johnson’06 and I make our way into the science center and ascend the first flight of stairs. For me, the tall, futuristic building is a normal part of my day—I walk across the bridges and atrium without a second thought. However, to Andrea it is completely new; the Center for the Sciences was built in 2008, two years after she graduated. As we seat ourselves in a nook with plump orange chairs, I wonder what it must be like for her to return to Beloit and to see how much has changed. As it turns out, many physical features on campus are different, but the spirit of the students and the academic excellence has remained. It is those qualities that Andrea has benefitted from the most. The critical thinking and writing skills she has learned have allowed her to thrive in all areas of her career and in higher education.

Andrea grew up in St. Louis, Mo., and upon arriving at Beloit realized that her writing was not quite on par with Beloit’s expectations. One professor in particular—Associate Professor of Classics Kosta Hadavas—helped her improve. Andrea remembers him sitting her down to go over a 20-page paper, word by word. She says that she developed her writing and thinking skills because the college pushes the students to work hard, and if they need help, the professors are there to offer guidance. They want you to succeed. “At Beloit no matter what you major in, you graduate a better thinker,” Andrea says.

After taking many different types of classes, Andrea enrolled in an art history course during her sophomore year and knew that it would become her major. Her passion did not fade after she graduated; instead she pursued a master’s degree in art history at the University of Connecticut and now balances her time between working at the St. Louis Public Library and studying for a master’s degree in library science at the University of Missouri. Beloit, she says, completely prepared her for higher education. She believes Beloit made her more thoughtful in general, and that she is now a natural critical thinker. In grad school, she was expected to think on a deeper level on a regular basis and noticed that she was more prepared than other students.
Andrea has discovered that she can apply her liberal arts education to many aspects of her life, and that is why it is worthwhile to go to a school like Beloit. “College years are formative. You become more of the person you are,” she says. When asked what her overall message is to students at Beloit, she thinks for a moment before answering. “Use the professors as resources,” she says, “and not just for academics. Develop relationships and get support from them.” She wants to let students know that it is important to take advantage of the education and everything else that Beloit offers.

Beloit does provide unique opportunities. Andrea was able to find her passion for art history, take other classes she was interested in, study abroad, and meet an extremely diverse group of people. She met some of her best friends at Beloit and says that even after they have spent long periods of time apart, “they still click instantly when they see each other again.” As we gather our things and prepare to leave, Andrea remarks, “people from Beloit are from all over the country and the world, and they all go on to do interesting things.” She is no exception.
When Greg Hanrahan’86 first came to Beloit College, he seemed to have a fairly clear idea of what his next four years would be like. He quickly established a double major in government and economics and management and became involved in student government, intramural sports, and his fraternity of choice—TKE. His college career would comprise some of the best years of his life, spent fulfilling the requirements for his majors and participating in school activities, right? Wrong. Although Greg’s liberal arts education at Beloit was, in fact, one of the greatest experiences he has ever had, it was nothing like what he expected.

From the day he stepped foot on campus, Greg’s Beloit education was all about opportunities. The creation and seizing of opportunities was an extremely important aspect of his college career. This is evident in his heavy involvement in student government where he helped give students a voice and the power to evoke change on campus. Although TKE wasn’t originally an option for fraternities at Beloit, Greg and a group of students brought it back to campus, giving male students an additional way to become involved in their campus community.

In academics, Greg knew what he wanted to do—or so he thought. Encouraged by a network of supportive professors and mentors, he explored various subjects, put himself out of his comfort zone at times, and discovered his true passion was something very different from economics and management. His true passion was education. After discovering his love for education, Greg, with the help of Beloit College, created and seized opportunities to put this passion into practice. For the second two years of his college career, Greg was able to apply the skills he learned in his education classes while teaching at a local middle school. In addition, Greg and three friends were the first students ever to attend and participate in Department of Education faculty meetings.

Greg’s experiences at Beloit encouraged him to explore, allowed him unique extracurricular opportunities that gave him a voice on campus, and helped shape his passions. It seemed after four years at Beloit, Greg’s future was most definitely set to unfold in education, right? Wrong.
Today, Greg Hanrahan proudly holds six gleaming, gold Chicago Bulls championship rings as well as the title of Senior Director of Premium Seating for the Chicago Bulls and the Chicago Blackhawks.

He has enjoyed a long, successful career in sports marketing and doesn’t regret his choice in the least. Although the difference in career choices may seem shocking, it’s no surprise Greg ended up in a field completely different from what he expected. After graduating from Beloit College, Greg had his dream teaching job lined up and was ready to spend the rest of his life pursuing his passion. However, he also discovered a unique opportunity in sports marketing. Because he had completed a well-rounded and intensive liberal arts education at Beloit, Greg was prepared to seize this opportunity. Today, he says he “is able to communicate clearly, work with people hailing from a wide variety of backgrounds, and assess information and put it into perspective.” In addition to a broad network of lifelong friends, his experiences at Beloit provided him with the skills necessary to embrace any opportunities that come his way, whether they are in his comfort zone or not. “Anything is possible at Beloit,” he says. “I always thought I would go into education, and now look at me. I’m in sports marketing.”

Greg Hanrahan exemplifies the characteristics of a true Beloiter—curious, adventurous, multi-faceted, and prepared to tackle anything life throws at him.
Nicole Downey says Beloit is where she met her best friends—people who the 2001 graduate still keeps in touch with today. “Everyone met their best friends at Beloit,” she says. Nicole raves about the great times she had and the many memories that came with them. Beyond being the place where she met her closest friends, however, Beloit is where she found herself and started forming the person she is today.

“I came here wanting to do law, and then after being here and exploring different subjects, I realized I wanted to study biology,” she says. Beloit had a lot to offer Nicole, and it took her the full first year to discover what the college was all about.

After Beloit, Nicole went on to graduate school for five years, receiving a Ph.D. in environmental science and engineering from Caltech (California Institute of Technology). Afterward she completed a post-doc at Harvard, and another at the University of Texas-Austin. She then started an environmental consulting firm in Houston, Texas, that specializes in air quality and greenhouse gas emissions.

Through her liberal arts education, she learned a lot, not just about biology, but also about many different subjects. Nicole says that a wide variety of knowledge beyond the sciences was helpful when she started her own business.

What was it about Beloit that helped Nicole achieve so much? She says Beloit helped her improve skills that gave her a step up in graduate school and also in starting her own business. “I knew how to write well, which a lot of people going to graduate school did not know how to do,” she says. “Now I do a lot of writing and a lot of science, but I do a lot of presentations on science. I think that’s something that Beloit taught me how to do very well—how to write and present ideas well.”

Nicole says that Beloit professors were “super-dedicated” to students and knew them on a personal level. “This really helped, because when I went to grad school it was normal for me to talk to a professor on a one-to-one level.” Nicole explains that the Beloit professors were very dedicated to teaching and taught so much useful information that helped her later on in life.
There were also many experiences at Beloit that shaped Nicole into the person she is today. She had the opportunity to do a research project in Ecuador, for instance. “That was really a personality-defining moment and changed my outlook on life,” she says. Research projects and study abroad are major elements of the liberal arts in practice.

“Beloit was really influential in my life,” she says. “It definitely shaped my personality, my education, and how I approach problems in life.” From feeling comfortable writing a 50-page paper, to starting her own business, to speaking intelligently with clients, Nicole explains that “Beloit builds confidence so when you leave here, you’re open to trying new things. People aren’t afraid to learn by failure, and they won’t give up when others would.”

Nicole sees something else in the kind of education students can get at Beloit. “People are interested in the greater good. Even coming back after college, you can see that,” she says. “Beloit has instilled goodness in the people here.”
Never Imagining Myself Here
Sarah Van Niewaal’02
by Kate Atkinson’15

In a typical work day as a financial representative at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., Sarah Van Niewaal’02 takes upwards of 75 calls in which she advises patients on payment options, explains insurance benefits, and clarifies the financial aspects of highly specialized, non-profit health care. Every day is different, and the advising process is highly individualized. The patients seeking care at Mayo Clinic come from all backgrounds and represent many nationalities. Ten years ago, Sarah would never have imagined herself here. Her days are often long and challenging, but as I speak to Sarah, it becomes clear that she wouldn’t have it any other way.

When I meet Sarah for our campus interview, she comments on the familiar scent of D.K.’s dining room, the site of her old on-campus job where she swiped ID cards during late night hours and befriended her now husband, Jon. The pervasive but not unpleasant smell of burgers and table spray has not changed in 10 years. In fact, it is Jon’s 10-year reunion that brings Sarah back to campus, though the couple visits every few years. As a prospective student hailing from Michigan, Sarah was attracted to the Beloit slogan, “Invent Yourself.” As she speaks about her experiences with eloquence and enthusiasm, it becomes clear that Sarah not only invented herself at Beloit, but that she continues to do so in her everyday life.

Whether she is navigating the financial minefield of health care provisions, volunteering her time to shelter work, or cultivating tomatoes in her backyard to make homemade salsa, Sarah is always actively learning and engaging with the people around her.

During her four years at Beloit, Sarah did a number of things she would never have imagined before arriving on campus. She studied abroad in the ancient and beautiful city of Budapest, wrote a 90-page paper on communism in Eastern Europe, partied in a makeshift swimming pool surrounded by hay bales at the Great Lakes party on the lawn of Sigma Chi, and, to her surprise, joined the sorority Theta Pi Gamma where she met an amazing variety of young women. The small classes and high expectations at Beloit taught her how to communicate, to be flexible, and to make a strong, clear argument.
“Writing all those papers forces you to learn how to present your ideas clearly and make a strong argument for yourself,” she tells me. She has also honed the skill of finding a learning opportunity in every experience, even under difficult circumstances. During her study abroad in Budapest, Sarah found herself homesick and missing Jon. Never one to be passive, she consoled herself by reading British literature classics, traveling to Prague, Krakow, and Transylvania, and gathering research for her honors paper.

Upon graduating from Beloit in 2002, Sarah worked in a variety of fields before becoming a financial representative. She has worked a desk job in a hotel, been a claims adjuster for Progressive Insurance, and volunteered with AmeriCorps. The variety of experiences she has had, both positive and negative, enables Sarah to bring a lot to her work at the Mayo Clinic. The ability to adapt her skills to different work environments and to navigate an unstable job market stems from her persistence and flexibility—both attributes that Sarah refined at Beloit. Her passion to learn and engage extends into her life beyond work as well. For Sarah, gardening and helping run an all-volunteer non-profit focusing on spaying and neutering feral cats fulfills the same passion as working with people every day. Always learning, always engaged, and always inventing herself, Sarah exemplifies a liberal arts education in practice.
1. Many of these essays discuss “practicing the liberal arts.” What examples do alumni provide to illustrate this concept? Based on those examples, what do you think it means to practice the liberal arts?

2. Jeff Jensen is a lawyer, and Todd Hansen runs an advertising agency, but both discuss how these positions involve wearing many different hats, from salesman to author, from event planner to accountant. Several other alumni stories similarly emphasize the importance of being able to employ a wide range of skills and perspectives in a flexible, context-dependent manner. How do alumni connect this ability to wear multiple hats to their Beloit education? How might this ideal inform your own academic trajectory at Beloit?

3. Catherine Nolan refers to Beloit as a “giant playpen,” while Veronica Siehl characterizes her experiences here “as having a series of ‘aha!’ moments.” What ways of approaching a Beloit liberal arts education are suggested by these depictions? How might you think about your classes and extracurricular activities differently with these analogies in mind?

4. A Beloit education incorporates learning experiences that take place beyond the traditional classroom. What examples of such experiences do these alumni stories provide? What kinds of experiential learning opportunities would you like to pursue while you are here?

5. When students first arrive on campus, many see the choice of a major as a career choice. What do these essays teach you about the relevance of the major in the lives of alumni? What about the relevance of coursework and experiences outside the major? How might the insights you glean from these essays shape your own approach to your education at Beloit?

6. Todd Hansen attended Beloit sight unseen. Veronica Siehl remembers her first moments away from home as challenging, but fun. How do their first days on campus compare to your own and those of your classmates? What do you think you’ll remember about your first days here five, twenty-five, or fifty years from now?

7. The collection includes some essays written by alumni and others written by first-year students who interviewed alumni. How are the two sets of essays different from one another? Do you learn different lessons from each set? If so, why might that be the case?

8. With which essays do you identify most easily? Why? If you could write a letter to one of these alumni, to whom would you choose to write, and what would you like to ask or tell him or her?