

PRESS RELEASE

## The First BA in Value Studies And a New European Approach to Liberal Education

In October 2009 the *European College of Liberal Arts* (in Berlin, Germany) will introduce a 4-year degree programme leading to a *Bachelor of Arts in Value Studies*. This programme, the first of its kind worldwide, represents a new European approach to liberal education.

In Europe, it is common for general education to take place in high school, while the years in higher education are dedicated to single-minded vocational or disciplinary training. It is not clear, however, that this system serves us well. In an age when technological progress is miles ahead of our general conceptual abilities, and when our global institution-building is far too crude for us to meet the political, economic and cultural challenges we are confronted with, it is time to improve our level of general education. Specialization is no doubt a necessary element in higher education, but it can no longer seriously be considered sufficient. We need young people who can see the connections between the expertise by which they make their livings and the larger concerns of mankind. And we need to change the mindset which discourages curious and ambitious young people from spending time on the only kind of education which can prepare them to address these concerns. To close the current gaps, we should (among other things) strengthen the level of general education both in our high schools and in higher education.

To serve this end, the European College of Liberal Arts has been created as a college without departments, dedicated to the integrated study of values. A young faculty, recruited from some of the best research universities in the world, has designed the *BA in Value Studies* for students who want to combine their pursuit of special interests with a demanding *studium generale*. In every part of the BA programme, students work with faculty from different backgrounds on moral, political, epistemic, religious, and aesthetic questions, with the understanding that such questions are naturally and deeply connected. Students spend half of their classroom time in a 'core course' devoted to fundamental questions about values, addressed through the close study of texts and works of art that have shaped, or seek to shape, the values we live by today. Against this background students choose two out of three possible areas of concentration: Art & Aesthetics, Literature & Rhetoric, Ethics & Political Theory. In this manner the BA programme is designed to provide not only a very high level of general education, but also excellent support for students interested in careers in politics, organizational work, public policy, law, journalism, or the art world. The programme also prepares students for continued study in academic disciplines such as philosophy, literature, political theory, and art history.

The ideals of liberal education have their origin in the European intellectual tradition. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, these ideals have been upheld, at least in higher education, mainly in the United States, where the two most common models of liberal education are the great books programme and the distribution requirement model. Instead of simply adopting one of these existing models, ECLA has chosen a more ambitious route. Through a series of curricular experiments that began in 2002, ECLA faculty have reformulated the classical ideals and developed a new 'value questions' approach to liberal education. The first premise of this approach is that questions about values have a pre-disciplinary claim on all of us: we discuss questions about justice, beauty, truth and other values around the dinner table with family and friends long before we go to universities. Placing such questions at the centre of a university

curriculum is unusual, but has many advantages. An ongoing concern with value questions results in academic training that is not *merely* academic, but relevant far beyond academia. A curriculum focused on value questions allows academics from many different backgrounds to work together with a shared sense of purpose. It promises a better integrated liberal education than the distribution requirement model, and is more flexible than the great books programme. It is also an approach that invites dialogue between different cultural and political commitments, and reflection on the relation between theory and practice. Most importantly, perhaps, the value questions approach educates the student not just as a future worker, but as a person and citizen. Good value questions always engage and challenge us personally. And the dialogues such questions inspire are, ultimately, ongoing explorations of the extent to which we can find common normative ground for shared lives. As Plato's Socrates observed, disagreement about values is a source of anger and enmity. By addressing value questions together, ECLA students educate themselves to inhabit a common world.

ECLA is a private, non-profit institution of higher education. The college has been running an International Summer University since 2000 and one-year programmes since 2002. The BA programme in Value Studies is the next big step in a project that is meant to put liberal arts back on the educational map of Europe.

ECLA has no religious or political affiliations. The college is supported by a philanthropic grant from the Christian A. Johnson Endeavour Foundation in New York that makes it possible to maintain a need-blind admissions policy and a world-class faculty student ratio of 1:7. Most of the teaching is organized around small discussion seminars and one-to-one tutorials in the Oxbridge style. Students and faculty come from all over the world and work together in English. Students live and study together on a small residential campus created around 8 renovated former GDR embassies in Berlin.

ECLA co-operates fruitfully with several other institutions of higher education, most importantly Bennington College in Vermont, Bard College in New York, and Bucerius Law School in Hamburg.

For more information about ECLA, please consult [www.ecla.de](http://www.ecla.de)

To schedule a campus visit or an interview, please contact:

Fiona Schnüttgen

Platanenstr 24

13156 Berlin

Germany

Telephone: +49 30 43 733 0

Email: [f.schnuettgen@ecla.de](mailto:f.schnuettgen@ecla.de)