

a search for the liberal college the beginning of the st johns program

A Search for the Liberal College: The Beginning of the St. John's Program

The pursuit of a liberal education has long been a cornerstone of higher learning, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking, broad knowledge, and the ability to engage with diverse ideas. In the United States, one institution stands out for its unique approach to liberal education: St. John's College. This article delves into the origins of St. John's Program, exploring its philosophy, curriculum, and the transformative impact it aims to have on students.

The Philosophy of Liberal Education at St. John's College

At the heart of St. John's College lies a commitment to the ideals of liberal education. This educational philosophy is grounded in several key principles:

- Critical Thinking: The ability to analyze arguments, identify assumptions, and evaluate evidence is central to liberal education. St. John's prioritizes this skill in all courses.
- Interdisciplinary Learning: The interconnectedness of knowledge is emphasized, encouraging students to draw connections across disciplines such as philosophy, literature, mathematics, and science.
- The Great Books: The curriculum at St. John's is based on a careful selection of classical texts that have shaped Western thought, providing students with a deep understanding of historical and philosophical contexts.

The Historical Context of Liberal Education in America

The roots of liberal education in America can be traced back to the early colonial colleges, which were established with the intention of promoting moral and intellectual development. By the 19th century, the focus began shifting, with many institutions adopting a more vocational approach. St. John's College, founded in 1696 in Annapolis, Maryland, sought to resist this trend and reaffirm the values of liberal education.

- Foundational Years: Initially established as King William's School, St. John's evolved into a college that emphasized a classical curriculum.
- The Great Books Program: In the 1930s, the college redefined its curriculum to focus on the Great Books of the Western tradition, a decision that would shape its educational philosophy for decades to come.

The Beginning of the St. John's Program

The St. John's Program, rooted in the liberal education tradition, was formally established in the 1930s, marking a significant moment in the college's history. This program was designed to challenge students intellectually and encourage them to engage with life's fundamental questions.