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The Value of a Cultural Education to an Engineer

By CHARLES P. CAREY, E. E. '27

[This essay was the prize winner at the last Tau Beta Pi initiation, having been submitted by Charles P. Carey, E. E., '27. Mr. Carey is now the proud possessor of a loving cup, which was given to the writer of the best essay in the group of candidates taken into Tau Beta Pi.]

WITHOUT a doubt, we are now in an era of specialization. With so many branches of art and industry, no one can hope to be competent in everything. The old maxim, "Jack-of-all-trades, master of none," holds more true now than in the day of its conception. Engineering, law, medicine, business, and every other outlet of human ingenuity has been split up into so many and such varied departments that versatility can be acquired in only a few; consequently, the modern trend for the student is to pick out the branch most suitable to him and to center all his energies in that direction.

In engineering, especially, has this tendency been noted. The average student after choosing his vocation will forget all else in his search for knowledge in his chosen calling. He proceeds to ostracize himself from all subjects not pertaining directly to his line. Commerce, literature, and the fine arts become to him a vast collection of facts and incidents for which he can have no use.

Such a student obviously is making a great mistake. In his zeal for success as an engineer he is forgetting that all his time will not be spent in the plant and designing room. If he is successful at all, he will find himself in another type of drawing room where a T-square, or the law of cosines, will not prove interesting topics of conversation. Society, in its social moments, does not care to be bored with "shop talk."

And, in the case of our ultra-specialized engineer, what else can he offer? His whole life has been tied up in mathematical formulae, which give no "rule of thumb" for happiness outside his work. Of course, he may adopt the attitude that most social gatherings are waste of time, and that he could spend his time in something practical which will produce results. But nature has ordained man a social animal.

Someone has correctly said that no man can be a success by himself. The efforts and cooperation of thousands are required to produce anything worth while. Therefore, since this element of personal contact is so important in life, a man cannot afford to have his fellow-beings class him as a one-track bore. I do not intend to convey the impression that one must be a social butterfly to achieve success. Far from it. Too often "the lion of the party" is just that and nothing more. But since sociability depends on common interest, the engineer must broaden his scope of understanding and attain some interests which are general interests to mankind.

The arts are the most efficient means of broadening one's mind. History, languages, and literature, all tend to show the dependence of the world's people on each other. With a knowledge of the humanities, comes an appreciation of the finer things of life. One sees and values many things not mentioned in handbooks and tables.

A study of the cultural arts gives one a greater regard for his fellow men, and opens his eyes to facts which would be otherwise overlooked. With

a true cultural background, the engineer sees his subordinates as men and not machines; his family and home ties become more lovable bonds, and life in general has a more pleasing aspect.

Thus the embryo engineer will do well to indulge in a little introspection before he leaves college and he will surely see the advantages which can be gained from a little time spent in the arts college.