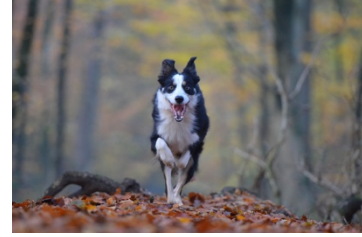


## WHERE ARE WE HEADING?

The other day my two buddies and I were walking our dogs through Natural Chimneys during this pandemic frenzy discussing life and the future of the academy. As we walked the soft dirt trails through the woods, we wondered out loud what the next few months would look like for students and teachers. It appears that schools and universities will be opening. We wondered what the university will be like? We hoped it would be more collegial than before the pandemic—that all the social distancing would remind us how important fellowship and companionship are to our wellbeing. And we hoped that would also better communication between administration and faculty. We also hoped that there would be much discussion about how to improve classroom and overall learning so that such transitions to online learning—planned or unplanned—wouldn't be quite as painful as it has for many of us, students and teachers.



Then our thoughts turned to the value of higher education. What, we asked ourselves, is this pandemic teaching us about the reasons why students should go to the university?

We explored many answers, but the one that we kept returning to was, “To learn how to be the best I can be!”

That purpose resembles the thoughts that James Madison had about education, too. Every student should read the words of James Madison on education. Madison believed that wisdom comes through learning and that learning is best done in an educational system that is available to everyone. None of our students should graduate without reading James Madison's thoughts on education. And everyone who teaches should also read James Madison's words on education.

Madison envisioned the university as a place where a person could learn about oneself, the other people on the planet, the planet that gives one life and the universe the planet belongs to. It is clear that our planet can be a lot better for everyone than it is. It is also clear that people can get along a lot better than they currently do. Everyone's dream should be to make the planet a better place in general and a better place for humans specifically to live.



Mankind has accomplished some amazing feats. However, the most beautiful city is nothing compared to a virgin forest. The most fantastic painting is not as pretty as a sunset. The greatest musical compositions do not sound as sweet as the melodious chirp of birds in unison or the rush of a cascading waterfall. Indeed, the best things in life are not human-made things at all.

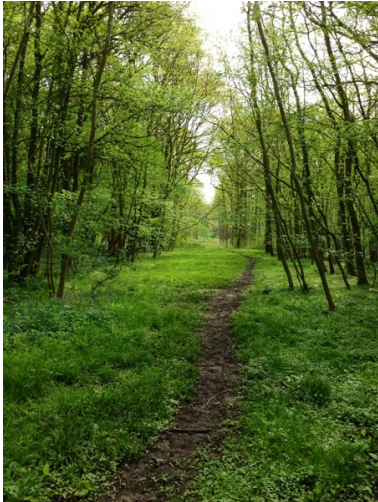
There are cultures on this planet that have never heard of electricity. And yet, in many of these cultures the people live long, healthy and happy lives. Unlike so-called civilized societies, they are not blacktopping the natural beauty so that they can drive oversized vehicles to lavish buildings stocked with mega-supplies for our mass consumption. Instead, they set aside green spaces for walking or running. Contrary to what many of us think, preserving the planet's natural beauty does not cost; rather, it pays, over and over again. How much better off would we be



by Trying alternative forms of transportation (but where a helmet when necessary - [educ.jmu.edu/~sochacjs/helmets.html](http://educ.jmu.edu/~sochacjs/helmets.html)).

God deals with all the peoples of the earth. Ironically, it's educated societies and educated people that have done more harm on this planet than the uneducated ones. Many societies that have modernized are experiencing dangerous health and environmental problems.

Humans need to discover the best way to live on this planet. And if you have discovered that way, take care not to use vulgarity or force on people to make them live by your ways. The good life will be self-evident, and people should gladly accept it if it is, indeed, the best way possible to live.



As we finished our walk, our tired dogs' tongues lolling out to the ground, we thought back to students. Many have expressed frustration and even down-right anger over the inconvenience the pandemic has caused and the damage *it* (not them, oh no, not them!) to their GPAs. But if you receive high grades and you are not learning new ideas and how to use your mind, then you should complain. We are all paying a high price so that students will learn how to use their minds. In fact, the biggest mistake you can make is not what the pandemic has done to your semester GPA: It is, instead, to graduate and not have learned to use your mind to its full potential. Challenges are something you should demand. Just because you are enjoying yourself does not mean you are benefiting yourself. And despite the inconveniences brought about by the pandemic, you do have a future!

So, be safe, be healthy and, most of all, BE WISE. And take some hikes with your buddies.