



*Creators have a signature—a unique approach, a particular texture, a style of their own. In the same way, the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (LAS) has a distinctive signature that helps its graduates stand out in the 21st-century workforce. Dean Guillermo Vásquez de Velasco explains.*

**What do you mean when you describe the “LAS signature”?**

Our brand of liberal arts is special, different from that at other universities. We draw upon the liberal arts to empower leadership for the common good. That’s our signature, our distinctive persona.

**Where did our signature come from?**

It’s always been our mission to be at the core of what the university does, and that’s not surprising. We were the first college of the university and, even as

DePaul evolved, we have remained at the core. There’s a very good reason why we are entrusted with the coordination of the first-year experience and the liberal studies program that virtually all undergraduates take. We provide that common denominator of intellectual experiences and fundamental skills that make a DePaul degree something greater than the sum of its parts.

**What are the elements of the LAS signature?**

We start with the university’s mission, to

do good and do it well. Its fundamental role is to tell us what is important. What are the priorities? What should we pay attention to?

Next, we are a large group of disciplines with a shared purpose. We know the world is full of challenges that require people to collaborate across fields as well as time zones. Fortunately, we're naturally predisposed toward multidisciplinary integration. Each one of our disciplines, of course, provides our students with a very rich knowledge base.

So, the mission helps us identify the problem. Our knowledge base allows us to understand the issues. The third component of our signature is this very special ability we have to deliver.

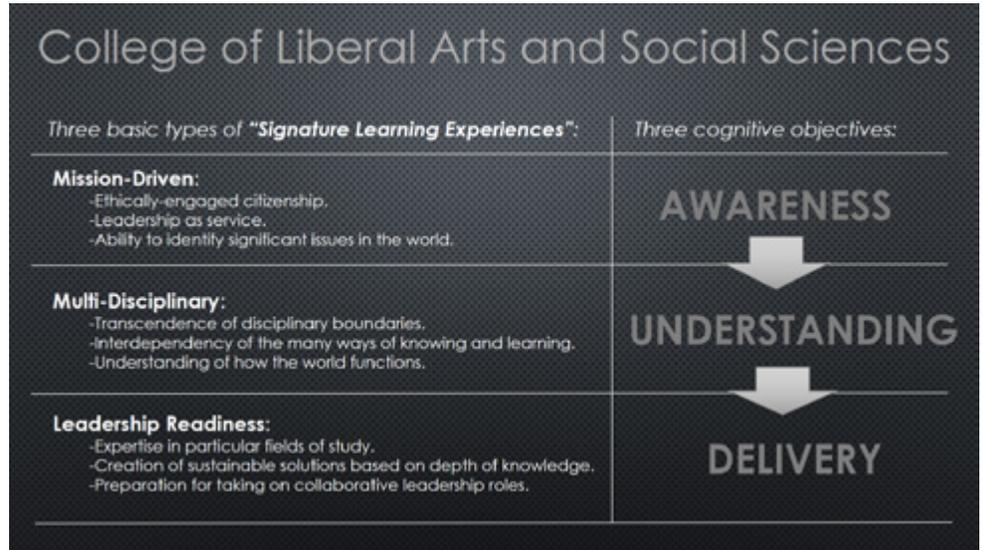
We move into action. That is very signature to us. We don't just recognize a problem, understand it, and then stay quiet. We're activists. We're collaborators. We are leaders.

### What do we do differently than liberal arts programs at other universities?

That's our secret recipe: the LAS signature learning experience. This isn't something that can happen in a traditional 300-seat lecture hall with very little interaction between faculty and students. We learn in classrooms and seminar rooms that function like liberal arts studios, where the dynamic is directed towards clear learning objectives but largely unscripted. Peer interaction is very, very high. We bring outside actors into the equation—alumni, collaborators, and even entire communities in many instances. We're project-driven. We do more than learn. We act.

### What is a "signature learning experience"?

It is a highly enhanced learning opportunity. It might be a program, a course, a project, even a single assignment, but these experiences bring together all the elements that make LAS



special: service for the common good, multiple disciplines, collaboration and interactions outside the classroom. It's a very powerful way to learn. It takes on a life of its own and is remembered forever by our students.

### What does that mean for LAS students and graduates?

By the time our students graduate, they are T-shaped individuals. They know something about everything and everything about something, the latter being their field of study. If I may say so, because of that particular cognitive profile, they are professional collaborators.

We know that in the 21st-century workplace nothing is done by a single individual. Everything is a product of collaboration, and our students bring that. They facilitate collaboration thanks to their multidisciplinary knowledge base, highly transferable skill set, and—very important but sometimes overlooked—their dynamic, cooperative attitude and culture.

Embracing a culture of collaboration means that teamwork is not viewed as something that you have to do, that you must do, but something that you get to do. It is a source of richness and enjoyment, and our graduates bring that feeling to the workplace. They become

key members of the collective, and soon they are identified as leaders among peers.

It's not only true that liberal arts graduates have far-reaching careers and can go to high places, but also that they can do it in the fast lane, because they bring to the table the flexible culture, knowledge base and skill set that are most needed. Employers see that. They're not just problem solvers; they are problem seekers.

### What do you mean by that?

They don't just take the problems that people bring to them. They are proactive in going out and identifying key problems and issues, guided by a moral compass.

The beauty is that when they have that attitude, the solution to a problem and the definition of the problem are interactive. They are not limited to the need of raising the bridge to let the boat go through. Now they can say, "Why don't we lower the river?" Or, "Why don't we do both things, half and half?"

LAS graduates have a repertoire of creative responses that your typical problem solver doesn't have.

Many universities claim to create leaders. What we do is to create leaders who know how to drive change for the common good. That's much more rare and impactful. That's our brand.