

**Education for future members of the legal profession in emerging economies:  
the role of humanities as intellectual infrastructure**

**Mustafa Nakeeb**  
**Coordinator of Program in Cultures, Civilizations & Ideas**  
**Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey**

Commenting on the history of higher education in mid to late twentieth century America, Derek Bok, the eminent professor of law and then-president of Harvard University remarked:

“Early educators put great stock in what a student could gain by acquiring a sufficient body of information and by observing and emulating superior minds in action. Faculties today are likely to perceive a more difficult, changeful, complicated world in which there are many conflicting points of view and many questions without prospect of answers. In such an environment, knowledge alone is not enough; the ability to think clearly about complex problems becomes more and more important. A critical mind, free of dogma but nourished by humane values, may be the most important product of education in a changing, fragmented society.” (*Higher Learning*, Harvard UP, 1986, p. 47)

What was true to Bok in 1986 is no less true today, when, if anything, society has become even more changeful and more complicated. In the brief overview of legal education in Turkey presented by Prof. Sirmen, one sees that the requirements of providing a solid foundation of professional training leave little time or place for curricular components to help achieve these broader goals of higher education. What can be said about legal curricula at Turkish universities is true of the vast majority of undergraduate degree programs in Turkey. One finds a significant amount of discipline-specific information and courses, and very little humane nourishment.

In the Mission Statement of my institution, Ihsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, however, the objective formulated by President Bok is clear to see:

*Bilkent University was founded to provide an environment for learning and intellectual growth encompassing the sciences, technology, humanities and the arts, to serve human welfare and foster peace on earth. Education at Bilkent is not simply a means to obtain a vocation, a career. Instead, it endeavors to nurture students in the way of thinking and of learning to learn.*

*With its diverse educational programs, scientific and scholarly research endeavors, and artistic and cultural activities, Bilkent University aims to help students/individuals develop themselves as critical, analytical and independent thinkers and life-long learners, so that they may*

*become the competent, creative, broad-minded, ethical and socially responsible leaders of tomorrow, who will contribute to the advancement of humanity.*

The objectives stated in this mission (particularly those highlighted) are ones for which our General Humanities Courses are particularly well-designed to meet, and continue the centuries-old tradition of the liberal arts. Then, as now, the subjects and skills taught were not seen as pertinent to a particular craft, trade or discipline, but rather what any capable, virtuous and active citizen would be expected to know.

At Bilkent, the vast majority of undergraduate students at our University take liberal arts courses as a part of their degree requirements. Students in the Faculty of Law are the only students who must take both HUM and Social and Political Thought courses as part of their degree requirements.

There are two courses of study at our institution that provide opportunities to develop these qualities in undergraduate students. The larger of these is offered by the Program in Cultures, Civilizations & Ideas, whose main function is to offer a two-course sequence general humanities course to a large number of undergraduate departments. The CCI faculty members who teach these courses are scholars in literature and philosophy, who often are themselves engaged in interdisciplinary research, and who are recruited on the basis of prior experience in teaching such courses.

A similar program is operated by the Department of Philosophy, whose faculty members each teach a two-semester sequence course in Social and Political Thought to a number of academic departments, including to the students in the Faculty of Law.

The courses offered by these two units share a number of common methods and objectives.

- Each of these courses requires students to read in their entirety masterworks of literature and philosophy, to appreciate and analyze a number of competing theories, world-views and differing forms of presentation of ideas.
- The courses are small in size (avg. 20), and students in class are required to discuss and argue for their own interpretations of the significance of the material they read with each other and their instructors.
- The many assessments used in these courses require students to write sustained essays, and to make an effort to understand the presuppositions and varied socio-historic factors that contribute to the diverse views they have been studying.
- The enrollments for these classes are composed of a mix of undergraduates from many different departments, which serves both to increase the diversity of opinion in class discussion, and to provide a richer undergraduate experience through sharing of class time and even course projects with students from many other departments.

- None of the students is expected to have a prior familiarity with the content of these courses, and in order to succeed they must become comfortable with applying their minds to problems and materials for which they have no technical training.
- The main concepts treated in these courses are ones which have been and continue to be central to the disciplines of the humanities: Justice, the individual's place in society, the common culture and shared values of humanity as expressed in varied times and places throughout the history of civilization.

The benefits of these courses are ones that apply to all undergraduates, and as much as any other element of their experience at Bilkent contribute to the goals of creating critical, humane thinkers. Reading these texts themselves, with the guidance of expert instruction provided by the faculty members in CCI and Philosophy who teach these courses, students learn and experience things that will help them be more conscious, more conscientious, better learners, better participants in their own lives, and in keeping with the principle of the liberal arts, better citizens of their respective countries.

The faculty of Law at Bilkent, like the Faculty of Engineering or the Faculties of Natural Science or Management (all of whose students take our liberal arts courses) must prepare their students for the professional life they are expected to enter. Such technical and professional training naturally requires many years of intense study in order to produce competent practitioners in their respective fields. However, as I hope to have shown, the inclusion of a few liberal arts classes in the curricula of such students will enrich the quality of their education, and give them a breadth of understanding, a tolerance of other points of view, and an appreciation of the nature of society and ourselves.

These benefits are to be had for all undergraduates, but are of particular importance for students and practitioners of the Law. In some countries, legal education is entered on only after completing an undergraduate course of study, where the experiences and skills developed by liberal arts education would have had an impact. This is not the case, though, in many countries, like in Turkey or Iraq. Also, as Minister Chalabi has pointed out, the practice of law requires one to understand what society and individuals are, how they develop and potentially differ, and to make decisions and judgements on questions of fairness, justice and responsibility. By reading and studying the humanities, and the classical works of literature and philosophy whose main ideas are precisely these topics, students will be in a much better position to assess these issues fairly and intelligently.