



26 April 2024

Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas

International Academic Forum

The Idea of University in the Era of Transformations: What Role Is There for Liberal Arts Education?

VMU Small Hall, S. Daukanto str. 28, Kaunas

With 35 years since its re-establishment as a university based on the principles of Liberal Arts, VMU aims to bring together academic partners, social stakeholders, and policymakers in an international forum to discuss how the Idea of University is being altered along with the current technological and societal transformations:

- *Should universities merely follow the immediate societal needs or transcend them by being a guide to a full-fledged and far-sighted advancement?*
- *How do universities withstand collisions with a bureaucratic desire to classify and cluster people and the world according to the preconceived schemes, and what scope is there for different Liberal Arts models?*
- *How does AI modify not only the forms of how we teach but also the content of what we teach in university study programmes, and how does the development in AI align with the nurturing of natural human creativity and entrepreneurial potential?*

KEYNOTE PRESENTERS

Nomeda & Gediminas Urbonas are artists, educators, and co-founders of Urbonas Studio, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts and Vilnius, Lithuania. Urbonas Studio is an interdisciplinary research platform that facilitates exchange amongst diverse nodes of knowledge production and artistic practice in pursuit of projects that transform civic spaces and collective imaginaries. The Studio collaborates with experts in different fields to develop practice-based models that allow participants—including their students—to develop artworks that merge new media, urbanism, social sciences, and pedagogy to critically address the transformation of civic space and ecology. Urbonas Studio has exhibited internationally at São Paulo, Berlin, Lyon, Gwangju, Busan, Taipei Biennales, Folkestone Triennial, Manifesta and Documenta exhibitions, including solo shows and curatorial projects at the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius, Venice Biennale, and MACBA Barcelona among others. Nomeda & Gediminas Urbonas conduct research and teach at the Art, Culture, and Technology (ACT) programme at MIT, USA, and are visiting professors at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas.



Nomeda & Gediminas Urbonas
(MIT)

Dialectics of Pragmatic Fictions

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

9:00–9:30 **Greeting coffee**

9:30–9:40 **Welcoming word**

9:40–10:30 **Keynote speech and discussion**

Dialectics of Pragmatic Fictions by Nomeda & Gediminas Urbonas (MIT)

In the context of discussion on the function of Liberal Arts in today's society, this presentation will discuss radical transdisciplinarity and argue for its value in creating Pragmatic Fictions—ever-changing infrastructures that support collaborative experiments in design, pedagogy, science, and artistic intelligence for learning and adapting to imminent unknowns.



Vilma Bijeikienė
Moderator

10:30–11:00 **Coffee break**

11:00–12:00 1st plenary discussion. *Diversity and transformations of HE study modules*

VMU and partner university representatives will scrutinise Liberal Arts and other HE study models dwelling upon their modifications and adjustments vis-a-vis with the current societal transformations aroused by the progress and influence of AI or the urgent needs inflicted by geopolitical and natural challenges.

Moderator and discussants:



Auksė Balčytienė

Professor of communication at VMU

Moderator



Joddy Murray

Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA

Liberal Arts tradition and transformations in the USA



Shalendra Sharma

Vice-President, Lingnan University, Hong Kong

Liberal Arts tradition and transformations in Hong Kong



Tsai-Yen Li

President of NCCU, Taiwan

The Initiation of Liberal Arts Education Renaissance in Taiwan



Vilma Žydžiūnaitė

Director of the Institute of Educational Research, VMU, Lithuania

Why do universities have liberal arts programs when the job markets have far too few opportunities for employment?



Sevket Benhur Oral

Researcher at Vytautas Kavolis Transdisciplinary Research Institute, VMU, Lithuania

Does Liberal Arts Education Remain a Possibility in Higher Education Today?

12:00–13:00 2nd plenary discussion. *Within and beyond university: expertise vs professionalism*

The discussion will consist of contributions by VMU alumni and stakeholders and will focus on the university studies and competencies in reflection of current realities of social, corporate and cultural world. The discussion will delve into how Liberal Arts education contributes both to the development of expertise and professionalism. As expertise is associated with superior performance (excellence in the professional domain), it cannot be valued alone, without considering professionalism.

Moderator and discussants:



Simonas Krėpšta

Board Member of the Bank of Lithuania and European Central Bank SSM. Alumnus of VMU Faculty of Economics and Management and World University Orienteering Champion representing VMU

“**Liberal Arts** University model was instrumental for my career in central banking due to its emphasis on a well-rounded education encompassing various disciplines beyond just finance or economics.”



Rasa Ostrauskaitė

Ambassador, EU Permanent Representative to the OSCE. Alumna of VMU Faculty of Social Sciences. Contributor to a number of publications on the EU foreign and security policy and co-author of two books

“Studying **Liberal Arts** proved pivotal to my journey towards becoming a diplomat. Liberal Arts cultivate critical thinking, communication skills, and a deep understanding of human culture and society. They equip you with the interdisciplinary knowledge crucial for success in diplomacy.”



Linas Vaitulevičius

Co-founder of Rubedos, a service robotics startup, software engineer and business developer. Alumnus of VMU Faculty of informatics

“**Liberal Arts** education provided a perspective that ultimately led to becoming a generalist, a sort of Swiss Army knife.”



Miglė Razgūnaitė

Junior researcher at VMU Research Institute of Natural and Technological Sciences and lecturer at the Department of Biology. Alumna of VMU Faculty of Natural Sciences

“VMU **Liberal Arts** model enabled me to discover different disciplines, not only my speciality in natural sciences but also humanities and politics, which fostered my critical thinking, intellectual curiosity and interdisciplinary understanding”.



Titas Petrikis

Award-winning Lithuanian composer, professor and head of Music Production programme at VMU Faculty of Arts. Alumnus of VMU Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy

“VMU **Liberal Arts** education has seamlessly integrated with my creative endeavors as a composer, enhancing my capacity for meaningful cross-cultural collaborations and molding me into a versatile professional with a unique blend of creative talent, coupled with a deep understanding of the arts, business, and international communications.”



Gustė Žukauskaitė

4th year student of Primary Education Pedagogy and Early Foreign Language Teaching at VMU Education Academy

“The principles of **Liberal Arts** are fundamental to a well-rounded education, critical thinking, effective communication and personal character development. It promotes curiosity, interdisciplinary thinking and lifelong learning, emphasizing long-term change by developing individuals who can adapt to a rapidly changing and evolving world”.



Jaq Greenspon

Associate professor of communication at VMU

Moderator