

Why teach beauty in a business school? Or, for that matter, why teach beauty to university students of any disciplinary focus? What follows is what I have gleaned from reading various scholars over the past year. Some use beauty and aesthetics interchangeably; some focus on one construct rather than another. For the purposes of this essay I have combined literature discussing beauty with literature discussing aesthetic sensibility. This is not a comprehensive literature review. It is merely the starting point in my investigation into this topic—an investigation that has informed the thinking about the class I am teaching at UW-Madison, as discussed in [last week's post](#). *It is a working document*. I hope readers will submit suggestions for further reading as well as critiques—particularly if I have misunderstood or mischaracterized any ideas. As I continue learning I will expand and modify my reflections; when the essay is finished I will publish the final version.

Why beauty in a business school?

Diane Ragsdale (Working Document 10 Feb 2015)

1. It's good for emotional, cognitive & spiritual development.

Harvard Psychologist, Howard Gardner, best known for his concept of multiple intelligences, argues that (along with truth and goodness) beauty is a once important classical virtue that merits (re)consideration in this age of “truthiness and Twitter.” In his 2010 book, *Truth, Goodness, and Beauty Reframed*, he asserts that 21st century education needs to concern itself with advancing new conceptions of all three virtues, particularly in light of the influence of new media technologies on the culture. Gardner conceptualizes truth as the property of *statements*; goodness as the *relations among human beings*, and beauty as the property of *experiences*.¹ While Gardner argues that the three virtues are distinct (“one can be good without being beautiful”) other classical and modern philosophers have argued that truth, goodness, and beauty (and sometimes justice) are inextricably intertwined. As 18th century German philosopher Friedrich Schiller put it in his essay *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, “... logic rests on ethics, and ethics on aesthetics.”² Or put another way, truth rests on goodness, and goodness on beauty. The proposed beauty course begins with the premise that in focusing on beauty we will inevitably bump into truth and goodness as they are related; however, for the moment I will set aside truth and goodness.

While Gardner seems particularly interested in *arts experiences* as a path to beauty he acknowledges that a traditional notion of beauty (i.e., harmony, balance, verisimilitude, and the ideal) “is no longer the exclusive or even primary calling card of the arts.”³

What, then, constitutes an experience of beauty? In Gardner's view, it is an experience with an object that is interesting; whose form is memorable; and which invites further encounters.⁴ Importantly, this experience results in what he calls a “tingle” in the observer (I prefer to characterize this as a *sensation*).⁵ Over time, judgments of beauty (which must have a basis to be valid) come to constitute a personal aesthetic sensibility. Gardner proposes that one way to develop one's aesthetic sense is to keep an “evolving portfolio”—a mental or physical catalogue that traces changing tastes over time.⁶

¹ Gardner (2011). *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed: Education in the Age of Truthiness and Twitter*. Philadelphia: Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Book Group.

² Schiller, F. (1967). In E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Eds.) *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Cited in Dobson 2007, p. 42.

³ Gardner 2011, p. 49.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, p. 54.

⁶ Ibid, p. 57.

He characterizes the determination of “what is beautiful” as “idiosyncratic” writing: “Beauty is continually affected by historical, cultural, and personal factors that by their nature resist precise determination and differ appreciably across individuals.” Gardner takes the point even further making the personal observation that (in contrast to his relationship to truth and goodness) he has “more agency over beauty than anything else.” That is, human beings have the freedom and capacity to come to their own decisions as to what is beautiful and what is not.⁷ Aesthetic judgments are personal and subjective. Similarly, John Dobson (1999) characterizes judgments as aesthetic when they are contextual and “there is no single answer, no rule, no dictum that can be simply applied.”⁸ (More from Dobson later.)

To the question of why one might embark on the process of developing an aesthetic sense, Gardner offers an internal justification—“because the pursuit of experiences that are beautiful constitutes a crucial part of life.”⁹ Art contributes meaning to life, and is important for emotional, spiritual, and cognitive development.

2. It leads us to more courageous and creative responses to world problems.

In my pursuit of a justification for this beauty course I might have stopped with Gardner’s propositions and simply argued that the college years are *the* opportune time to begin or advance the process of personal aesthetic development; however, given that I was coming to the University of Wisconsin-Madison under the auspices of a business school—and because every time I mentioned the class people (arts people, business people, arts-and-business people) would furrow their brows and look rather perplexed—I decided to expand my reading to see if I could strengthen the argument and make it specific to the opportunity at hand. In doing so, I discovered a strand of literature on beauty (also frequently characterized as aesthetic sensibility) and its particular relevance to students and leaders of business.

Management and leadership scholar, Nancy Adler, perceives the need for beauty in higher education as more pressing, strategic, and utilitarian than Gardner. In a 2010 speech and subsequent paper, *Leading Beautifully: The Creative Economy and Beyond*, Adler asserts that management schools need to be teaching beauty because we are facing global crises (e.g. poverty, health, education, environment, and economic systems) and we need solutions to them. She sees beauty as a necessity because (a) these and other crises must be seen and not denied (and artists seem to be particularly good at this kind of seeing) and (b) our goal must go beyond making the world “less ugly”; business leaders need to aspire to imagining *beautiful* solutions. She asks:

What level of creativity would it take for more companies to achieve outstanding financial performance by focusing primarily on the well-being of civilization and the planet? How might society reposition public discourse, redirecting it away from its current obsession with denial and blame and toward designing ‘beautiful outcomes’ the world yearns for? What would it take for most companies to profitably embrace such a macro-level, ‘big picture’ perspective?

Her answer to these lofty and provocative questions is that business education needs to foster three types of courage that are exhibited in both great leaders and great artists: (1) the fortitude and capacity to “see reality as it is”; (2) the daring to imagine new (beautiful) possibilities; and (3) the conviction to inspire others to shift their sights from current reality to imagining beautiful solutions.¹⁰

⁷ Interview Transcript (Richard Heffner and Howard Gardner). Richard Heffner’s *Open Mind*. Air Date: 2 July 2011. Available for download at <http://www.thirteen.org/openmind/media/howard-gardner-on-truth-beauty-and-goodness/2310/>.

⁸ Dobson (1999). *The Art of Management and the Aesthetic Manager*, p. 173. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

⁹ Gardner 2011, p. 42.

¹⁰ Adler (2011). *Leading Beautifully: The Creative Economy and Beyond*. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 20:3, p. 210.

3. It leads to wisdom through accurate seeing.

Another related argument for teaching beauty in a business school comes from Sandra Waddock, who advances a conceptual framework that makes a link between what she calls “wisdom within” (later she reframes this as “responsible leadership”) and the three classical virtues, which she relates to *moral imagination* (the good), *systems understanding* (the true), and *aesthetic sensibility* (the beautiful).¹² She argues that wisdom in leadership is realized when all three components exist and there is a balanced consideration of their interests. She takes as a starting point Russell Ackoff’s definition of wisdom—“the ability to perceive and evaluate the long-run consequences of behavior”¹³—and then identifies “seeing,” as the fundamental component of this ability. Here’s how she explains her use of the word, *seeing*:

*By that I mean ‘seeing without blinders,’ the title of a paper by Bazerman and Clugh (2006), without ‘motivated blindness’ to ethical issues (Bazerman and Tenbrunsel 2011), or, positively stated, by seeing as accurately as possible in any situation and in multiple domains. Such accurate seeing is fundamental to the capacity to be wise—and is associated with an integration of the three core elements of wisdom—or the good, true, and beautiful as complex and interactive guiding factors for decisions and actions in the person who is wise.*¹⁴

Waddock equates *seeing*, specifically, with the “aesthetic sensibility of wisdom” (i.e., the beautiful) and says that it allows for insights that are “creative—yet somehow truthful.”¹⁵ She makes a link between the kind of seeing she observes in business leaders and the seeing that art enables or requires:

*How often do we respond, “That’s beautiful,” to an action or decision taken that results in a better (i.e., wiser) solution than might have been previously envisioned. Like such wise decisions or actions, much of art is actually about ‘seeing’ the world in new ways. Conversely, much of wisdom is also about seeing new solutions or courses of action in situations, which is an integral part of an aesthetic sensibility. Aesthetic sensibility is needed for understanding the emotional, cultural and aesthetic (i.e., sensual) impacts of decisions, actions, and situation.*¹⁶

Waddock asserts that there are four leadership capacities that can be developed through the cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility (i.e., “better seeing”):

- An intuitive grasp of the non-rational or observable elements of situations and decisions;
- Creativity in imagining solutions or future action;
- Understanding of relationships among elements in a system in a ‘design’ sense; and
- The capacity for balancing conflicting elements with the greater good in mind.¹⁷

¹² Waddock (2010). Finding wisdom within—the role of seeing and reflective practice in developing moral imagination, aesthetic sensibility, and systems understanding. *Journal of Business Ethics Education*, 7:177-196.

¹³ Ackoff, R. (1999). On learning and the systems that facilitate it. *Reflections*, 1:1, p. 16. Reprinted from The Center for Quality of Management, Cambridge, MA, 1999.

¹⁴ Waddock (2014). Wisdom and responsible leadership: Aesthetic responsibility, moral imagination, and systems thinking. In D. Koehn & D. Elm (Eds.) *Aesthetics and Business Ethics*, p. 131. New York and London: Springer.

¹⁵ Ibid, p 136.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 135.

¹⁷ Waddock 2014, p. 140.

4. It teaches judgment and the ability to distinguish excellence from its byproducts.

Likewise, John Dobson suggests in his 2007 paper, *Aesthetics as Foundation for Business Activity*, that an understanding and consideration of *beauty* is valuable because it provides an alternative basis by which to take decisions.¹⁸ He reflects:

On a practical level, on what basis, by which criteria should decisions be made in business? This latter question recognizes that even the smallest decisions in day-to-day business are intertwined with the biggest philosophical questions. Just as any decision we make in our individual lives rests, for its ultimate justification, on some notion of the good life for us; so any micro-business decision rests, for its ultimate justification on some macro-business philosophy. The aesthetic perspective provides a way of answering this fundamental question. ... Consider these three basic questions relating to a decision in or on business:

- 1. Is it profitable?*
- 2. Is it ethical?*
- 3. Is it beautiful?*

*At first blush, the third question—Is it beautiful?—might appear odd, out of place, perhaps trivial in comparison to questions one and two. ... However, when beauty is adequately defined, the third question becomes the most fundamental criterion of the three.*¹⁹

Dobson argues for the importance of aesthetic judgment in business decisions, and outlines the five essential qualities that distinguish such acumen. He characterizes them as follows:

- *Disinterest*: In contrast to economic judgment (which is premised on accumulation of wealth) or moral judgment (which is premised on application of ethical standards), aesthetic judgments are for their own sake and require no further justification.
- *Subjectivity*: In contrast to objective truth that requires a body of knowledge, aesthetic judgment concerns (and its quality reflects) a relationship between object and subject.
- *Inclusivity*: Aesthetic judgment is non-prejudicial and considers all aspects of a phenomenon.
- *Contemplativity*: Aesthetic judgment involves contemplation, not just pursuit of pleasure.
- *Internality*: That which arises from aesthetic judgment is internal in the sense of having been created by the individual.²⁰

Dobson suggests that aesthetic judgment is needed in business leaders, in particular, because they face the continual challenge of distinguishing between *excellence* and its by-product, *material wealth*.²¹

One could argue that Dobson's distinction requires something like the "art of seeing" proposed by Waddock—in particular, it seems to require the ability to see past one's own financial self-interest. In actuality Dobson is arguing for an expanded notion of self-interest that includes a notion of *community*. Dobson advances the notion of a 21st Aesthetic Manager and contrasts this ideal type with the Technical Manager (pursuing efficiency and wealth maximization for shareholders) and the Moral Manager (tethered by a spiritually unanchored code of ethics that generally gains traction only insofar as it serves the ultimate end of making

¹⁸ Dobson, J. (2007). Aesthetics as a Foundation for Business. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 72:1, 41-46.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 41.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 43.

²¹ Ibid, p. 45.

money). The Technical Manager and Moral Manager are products of modernism in that both rely upon reason and external standards of success; while some have suggested Dobson's Aesthetic Manager is post-modern, he conceptualizes the Aesthetic Manager as the manager left when you carve away modernism. In this sense, it aligns with the pre-modern "artisan" or "craftsman" who strives for excellence in craft above profits. Dobson's Aesthetic Manager is grounded in the virtue ethics of classical philosophers (*wisdom, courage, temperance and judgment*). Rather than being torn between making decisions that make economic sense, or making decisions in line with moral rules untethered from meaning (a code of ethics), the aesthetic manager is a man or woman of excellent character (internal standards), who approaches decisions holistically and contextually. The Aesthetic Manager does the right thing for its own sake, not just because "good ethics is good business."²²

5. It leads to heightened and expanded consciousness—a shift from focus on self to other.

If you think in terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Dobson and others are talking about pushing leaders beyond a notion of success (typical of business schools) in terms of achievement, status, responsibility, and reputation (level 4) to thinking in terms of achieving higher needs (levels 5-8) both for themselves and others.²³

- (8) Transcendence – helping others to self-actualize
- (7) Self-actualization – personal growth, self-fulfillment
- (6) Aesthetic needs – beauty, balance, form, etc.
- (5) Cognitive needs – knowledge, meaning, and self-awareness
- (4) Esteem needs – achievement, status, responsibility and reputation

In a similar vein, drama and theater education scholar Joe Winston asserts that an education in beauty can be a means by which to "expand and heighten our consciousness."²⁴ The cornerstones of his argument come from the Irish novelist, Iris Murdoch, and the aesthetics scholar, Elaine Scarry. Murdoch's pursuit of an answer to the question, "How can we make ourselves better?" was what ultimately led her to beauty. In the essay, *The Sovereignty of Good*, she proposes that while bettering the self was once the domain of religion, in a secular age, beauty is the "most obvious thing in our surroundings" to help us "move in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity, and realism."²⁵ And like Waddock, Murdoch perceives that beauty promotes better seeing. In an analysis of Murdoch, Winston writes:²⁶

A key point made by Murdoch is that this raising of consciousness brings us closer to a truthful, more objective vision of things as they really are, a vision often masked by our prejudices and common, everyday anxieties. She calls this the 'realism of compassion', that realism that liberates us from our 'blinding self-centered aims and images.' (Murdoch, 1991, p. 67)

Murdoch calls this shift away from blinding self-centeredness, *unselfing*. Responding to Murdoch, Elaine Scarry positions beauty as an agreement between self (perceiver) and other (perceived) and defines Murdoch's

²² Dobson 1999, pp. 126-175.

²³ An acknowledgment to John Michael Schert, currently visiting artist and social entrepreneur in residence for the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and UChicago Arts for helping me make the connection to Maslow's hierarchy.

²⁴ Winston, J. (2006). Beauty, goodness and education: the arts beyond utility. *Journal of Moral Education*, 35:3, 285-300.

²⁵ Murdoch, I. (1991). *The sovereignty of good*. London: Routledge. As cited in Winston 2006, p. 285.

²⁶ Winston 2006, p. 297.

“unselfing” as a “radical decentering of the perceiver” that stems from this agreement between subject and object.²⁷

Providing university (and other) students with experiences that can encourage a shift in focus away from self may be of increasing importance according to a recent essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Sociologist Steven J. Tepper asserts that we are living in a period in which institutions of learning need to provide courses that help students “realize that authentic growth comes as much from escaping as from discovering the self.”²⁸ Tepper makes a link between the rise in cultural activity focused on personal expression (what he calls *me experiences*) and several studies that indicate that empathy, compassion, moral reasoning and tolerance may be declining; ultimately, he makes a case that what is needed (both in the culture-at-large and at universities) is fewer *me experiences* and more *bigger-than-me experiences*. He distinguishes the two, writing:

*“Me experiences” are different from “bigger-than-me experiences.” Me experiences are about voice; they help students express themselves. The underlying question they begin with is, “What do I have to say?” BTM experiences are about insight; they start with, “What don’t I know?” Voice comes after reflection. Me experiences are about jumping into a project and making something—an idea, an artifact, a piece of media. BTM focuses on John Dewey’s notion of “undergoing”—making something happen in the world, which requires, first, a shift in our own subjectivity. We must anticipate problems, struggle with ideas, seek some resolution. It’s a process.*²⁹

Tepper provides a handful of examples of educators who have successfully fostered BTM experiences, including an assignment from Harvard University art historian, Jennifer Roberts, who requires her students to attend the Museum of Fine Arts and sit in front of one painting for three hours. One could argue that such an arts experience is both a Me Experience and a Bigger Than Me Experience—and that art may be particularly well-suited to helping individuals traffic between these two types of experiences.³⁰

6. It offers an alternative denomination of value

Bill Sharpe (2010) also contributes greatly to a conceptualization of the arts experience and its function in society. In his monograph *Economies of Life*, he elaborates five economies and their “shared denominations of value” in a table.³¹ The last of these is the experience economy of art.

Economy	Currency	Statement of Shared Denomination of Value
Competitive Games	Score	The economy of scoring coordinates individual games of a particular kind into a collective competitive sport.
Democracy	Votes	The economy of democracy coordinates individual preferences into collective policies and powers.
Science	Measurement	The economy of science coordinates individual phenomena into collective ‘objective’ knowledge.
Exchange	Money	The economy of exchange coordinates individual use values of alienable property into collective markets.
Experience	Art	The economy of experience coordinates individual lives into the collective

²⁷ Scarry, E. (2001). *On Beauty and Being Just*. London: Duckworth, p. 61. As cited in Winston 2006, p. 297.

²⁸ Tepper, S. (2014). Thinking ‘Bigger Than Me’ in the Liberal Arts. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 9/15/2014. Available at <http://chronicle.com/article/Thinking-Bigger-Than-Me-in/148739/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Thanks to artist Carter Gillies for this line of thinking.

³¹ Sharpe, B. (2010). *Economies of Life: Patterns of Health and Wealth*, p. 54. Devon: Triarchy Press Ltd.

What Sharpe's framework seeks to illustrate is the incommensurability of these various currencies of shared valuation. The score of a sports game may tell us who won or lost but it can't help us understand the individual or shared experience of the game, for example. Sharpe elaborates on art as the currency of experience and the way it coordinates individual and shared experience:

*To see something as art is to respond to it as an expression of personal experience, as the trace of life. To become art, something must move from being private to circulating amongst us as a means of sharing the experience of being human, taking its place in the continuous dance of our culture. In doing so, like dance, its meaning is made, shared, and reflexively remakes our experience of our selves.*³²

Like Dobson, Sharpe is suggesting that art gives us a different basis on which to make judgments or decisions—because it provides an alternative system of valuation. Moreover, extrapolating from the framework, one could argue that one role of art may be helping business leaders to experience their organizations as *human*:

*The currency of art supports us in valuing each moment of our life with respect to our understanding of the human—the human as others have experienced it, put in relation to the particular choices in front of me here and now.*³³

7. It is disruptive of the self and the business enterprise; it helps us confront the *status quo*.

A recurring theme in much of the literature cited thus far is that beauty is disruptive of the self. Organizational theorist James G. March seems to argue that it is also disruptive of the business enterprise. In this his assertions are similar to Adler (2011) who proposes that we need to cultivate beauty (read: vision and hope) because “for the first time in history, leaders can work backward from their aspirations and imagination rather than forward from the past” (i.e., the *status quo*).³⁴ In his 2013 essay, *In Praise of Beauty*, March positions *beautiful* ideas as a counter to *relevant* (as in “useful”) ones and argues for their importance:

*...[A] commitment to beauty in irrelevant ideas is often subversive. It often yields ideas that are inconsistent with conventional thought and thereby are often both obnoxious to the defenders of conventionality and embraced by critics of the status quo, for whom they are seen as allies in the eternal battle with the establishment. However, the pursuit of beauty proclaims neither special animus nor special allegiance to any particular intellectual, social, or organizational regime. Rather, it reflects a deeply personal urge to be surrounded by the aesthetic sensations of beauty, not as an instrument of social change, but as reflective of human need, not as a substitute for the rigors of analysis but as a property of them.*³⁵

In line with Dobson, March suggests that the value of studying beauty in business is that we need a basis on which to act (take decisions, generate ideas, identify solutions) that is not beholden to economic interests or institutional norms. His reflections bring to mind Joseph Schumpeter's distinction between the entrepreneur and the static majority—and its extension to the artistic realm as conceived by Richard Swedberg. Swedberg's

³² Ibid, p. 46.

³³ Ibid, p. 55.

³⁴ Adler 2011, p. 208.

³⁵ March, J.G. (2013). In praise of beauty. *M@nagement*, 16:5, 732-738, p. 733.

table suggests that the entrepreneur—who is able to resist the status quo and who innovates by creating new products, methods, markets, and forms of organization—approaches work in a manner similar to the artist.³⁶

The Entrepreneur/The Artist	The Static Majority
Breaks out of an equilibrium	Seeks equilibrium
Does what is new	Repeats what has already been done
Active, energetic	Passive, low energy
Leader	Followers
Puts together new combinations	Accepts existing ways of doing things
Feels no inner resistance to change	Feels strong inner resistance to change
Battles resistance to his actions	Feels hostility to new actions of others
Makes an intuitive choice among a multitude of new alternates	Makes a rational choice among existing alternates
Motivated by power and joy in creation	Motivated by needs; stops when these are satisfied
Commands no resources but borrows what he needs	Commands no resources. Has no use for new resources

8. Because culture matters and it is changing—and it helps us understand these changes.

March's line of reasoning also dovetails with the growing recognition of the importance of aesthetics in business training—both as a component of what has come to be thought of as design thinking, and as an increasingly important feature in what Jeremy Rifkin calls an era of *cultural production*, in which more and more “cutting edge commerce” will stem from the production and marketing of cultural experiences.³⁸ Likewise, in his forthcoming essay, *All our Tomorrows*, Alan Freeman argues that in an era in which the “characteristic form of consumption” is culture, arts appreciation must be advanced—not passively, but via “knowledge of how it is done.” He stresses the need to cultivate “aesthetic demand,” and proposes that “the ‘Three Rs’ of the 21st Century are the design, production, and performance of beauty.”³⁹

Importantly, Rifkin cautions that this trend toward the commodification of culture will have troubling consequences if the cultural sphere ends up, essentially, being devoured by the commercial sphere. Bringing the two spheres into balance is critical, he argues, writing:

*If the workings of global networks, cyberspace commerce and cultural production represents one side of the new politics of power in the coming century, then the re-establishment of deep social exchange, the recreation of social trust and social capital and the restoration of strong geographic communities represents the other side. The contrarian rallying cry, in an era increasingly given over to short-lived facile connections, virtual realities, and commodified experiences, is Geography counts! Culture matters!*⁴⁰

Culture does matter and it is rapidly and fundamentally changing. Perhaps the final justification for a course in beauty is that business leaders (as much as anyone) need to be able to see and understand these changes locally, nationally, and globally. Georgetown professor of public diplomacy, and former ambassador to the

³⁶ Swedberg, R. (2006). The cultural entrepreneur and the creative industries: Beginning in Vienna. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 30(4), 243-261, p. 250.

³⁸ Rifkin, J. (2002). The age of access: the new politics of culture vs. commerce. Paper presented at the 2002 Ars Electronica Festival and printed in the Festival Catalogue (pp. 43-48). Paper retrieved from <http://www.itu.dk/people/ajsm/delemappe/rifkin.pdf>

³⁹ Freeman, A. (Draft paper, soon to be published in the book *The New Economy of the Arts*), cited with permission from the author.

⁴⁰ Rifkin 2002, p. 47.

Netherlands, Cynthia P. Schneider has argued that an important method for doing so is to observe the works of artists. Schneider has spoken and written extensively on the lessons in diplomacy from the Arab Spring, and in particular has examined the question that many were asking in the days following the revolution—*Why didn't we, in particular the CIA, see the Arab Spring coming?* Schneider asserts that this is the wrong question because it reflects a “twentieth-century-men-in-suits-around-a-table version of diplomacy.” Ultimately, she argues that we missed the Arab Spring because we were looking in the wrong place. Instead of “governments talking to governments and authorities talking to authorities,” diplomats and intelligence agencies should have been listening to the music of Arab hip-hop artists, looking at the graffiti on their walls, and watching their films. If they had, they would have anticipated the revolution. While they might not have predicted its time and date, she makes the case (using lyrics, text, and visual images) that they would have, without a doubt, *sensed* that it was coming.⁴¹

A conclusion and caveat about outcomes.

In the *Harper's* article, “Dehumanized: When Math and Science Rule the School,” author Mark Slouka describes the drama of American education today:

It's a play I've been following for some time now. It's about the increasing dominance - scratch that, the unqualified triumph - of a certain way of seeing, of reckoning value. It's about the victory of whatever can be quantified over everything that can't. It's about the quiet retooling of American education into an adjunct of business, an instrument of production.

Discussing the challenges facing one of the victims in this drama – the humanities – Slouka references poet, classicist and former dean of the humanities at the University of Chicago, Danielle S. Allen. He writes of Allen that she “patiently advances the argument that the work of the humanities doesn't reveal itself within the typical three- or five-year cycle, that the humanities work on a fifty-year cycle, a hundred-year cycle.”⁴²

It prompts the question: *What about a course on beauty? On what cycle might its work reveal itself?*

I have been lecturing at a university in Europe for the past four years and have experienced firsthand the “certain way of seeing, of reckoning value” that Slouka problematizes. One could argue that a course on beauty is a form of subversion against such a way of seeing; but it seems that would be the case only if it could somehow sidestep the need to deliver outcomes.

In the preceding pages, I have endeavored to provide some justification for offering a course in beauty at a business school. It is not lost on me that there is deep irony (if not hypocrisy) in making such justifications for a class on beauty.

When I proposed to teach the class I did not need such justifications for myself. I thought, “Wouldn't anyone benefit from time spent thinking about beauty? I know I would have when I was at university.” But, of course, this is naïve. As much as I and other humanities-types may see the intrinsic value of beauty in a business school, it is not intuitive. Further justifications are warranted. Thus, this whole essay is an answer to those with furrowed brow who have been asking, since the first day I talked about this class, “Why should business schools teach beauty?”

⁴¹ Schneider, C.P. (2013). Arts, Culture, Media and the Arab Spirit. BOLDTalks 2012. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2nOVAcHhBM>

⁴² Slouka, Mark. “Dehumanized: When Math and Science Rule the School,” published by Harper's Magazine, September 2009 issue. Available at: <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2009/09/0082640>

Though part of me wants to quip, “They probably shouldn’t unless they believe that aesthetics, art, nature, and beauty are important for their own sake,” I recognize that the question is generally a sincere one and so I have endeavored to offer a sincere response. Moreover, I believe the management scientists and philosophers cited in this paper make compelling arguments for beauty in a business school (though much more has been theorized than tested through empirical studies).

Ah, there’s the rub. How to test? When might one reasonably expect a class in beauty to result in wisdom in leadership, exactly? And is this beauty class at UW-Madison a valid test of that proposition?

I like to think of this class as an exploratory study: a joint-experiment between me, the students, other scholars and artists joining me in the classroom, the institutions sponsoring my residency, and other stakeholders. Can we allow it the space to be an exploration? The real question – can we take to heart the words in this paper and give ourselves permission to focus on the exploration of beauty for its own sake rather than what it might deliver to the students in tangible outcomes 12-weeks from now? We’ll see ...

No matter what, I’m deeply grateful to UW-Madison Business School and the Bolz Center for Arts Administration for giving us the opportunity to try.