*What is the Michael Polanyi College?*

By: Katarina Hall

The Michael Polanyi College is a college created for the students by a group of responsible learners that share and create knowledge. It is a place for innovations, for breaking paradigms and barriers; where dialogue is a great source of learning, where students begin to think for themselves and where people have a thirst for learning. Students challenge themselves to create a culture of questioning in order to acquire knowledge and understanding, and to learn from experiences and from any other source available for the discovery of the true self.

The program at MPC (Michael Polanyi College) is based on Liberal Arts education, which provides a theoretical basis for all practical and applied studies. The study of liberal arts provides a broad understanding of ourselves as persons and as part of society, also of our culture and social relationships. The main reason why the MPC is based on liberal arts is because it helps us to question ourselves, each other and the world, to be open and view life on a wider context, to be life-long learners, to be able to make discriminating moral choices and above all, to gain self-knowledge.

The MPC program takes place at Universidad Francisco Marroquín for many different reasons, but the main ones are because of the university principles. The university mission is the following “The mission at UFM is to teach and disseminate the ethical, legal, and economic principles of a society of free and responsible persons”. UFM was also founded by values of a Libertarian Philosophy, some of these values are academic liberty, theory and practice, academic excellence and individualism.

The MPC is also grounded on the same principles as the UFM. Both institutions want to accomplish the freedom of society and people, but to be free we have to have our own understanding of things, not the understanding of society. In regular education not all students are free since they don’t reason out everything for themselves. The MPC looks for a new ethical and real way to learn, and the UFM offers and excellent ground and values for the starting of such innovating way of learning.

In order to achieve our desired values and goals it is important to build our curriculum in a correct way. This intensive three year program engages the major questions of human conversations. Our curriculum contains the seven liberal arts of the classical study. The Seven parts are included in the Trivium and in the Quadrivium. Apart from these seven liberal arts there will also be four more which are derived from the main seven: praxeology, philosophy, theology and entrepreneurship. The Trivium is the foundation for medieval liberal arts, consisting of three major parts which serve as a preparation for the Quadrivium. The first part of the Trivium is general grammar, which is the art of symbols and of combining these symbols in order to express thoughts or ideas. In other words it is the main language. The second part of the Tritium is logic, which is the art of thought and analysis. It is the way we make connections between things in order to understand and capture information. This is impossible achieve without understanding the grammar section. The last part of the Trivium is rhetoric. This is the adaptation of the language, that is useful in order to be able to communicate from one to the other.

The Quadrivium contains the last four of the seven classical liberal arts. It is divided into two major subjects, each with its application. The first major subject is Geometry, which is the theory of space. Following this comes the application of theory of space, which is Astronomy. The second major subject is Arithmetic, being the theory of numbers, and its application, which is Music.

The four extra subjects added to the classical studies are praxeology, Philosophy, Theology and Entrepreneurship. By praxeology we understand the study of human actions, ways or the forms in which people use means in order to achieve a specific end. By philosophy we think about thinking, we find out who we are. We make theories and come up with ideas in order to explain or to give meaning to things. The next subject is Theology, which has been a part of human life since the beginning. It starts by asking questions about our existence, our traits as humans, our environment and our meaning, until we reach questions or assumptions about a supernatural entity that created all. For some this entity might be God. The last subject is entrepreneurship. By this we mean expressing ourselves by actions and projects and not with words. In order to be truly innovating and to be a part of the world we live in.

Another important aspect of our curriculum is that our 4-month terms are based on an inquiry approach. Each term will have a fundamental questions which are interrelated with the rest of the terms, in order to take increasing ownership of the curriculum. The goal is that by the end of a term the students will have high levels of concepts and knowledge of the given inquiry. The inquiries for each term will be in the following order: nature of thought, nature of matter and motion, nature of history of art and artifact, nature of human action, nature of knowing and of being, and vocation.

The fifth semester is used for the student to expand his knowledge abroad. In this semester the student will get to work on his passions and on what we call “The Great Work”. The great work is an opportunity for the student to produce something in which he can express his dreams and achieve something greater. This work will have to be something that is publishable, in the sense that it is exposed to the public. The great work could be anything, it is up to the student to choose, it could be all the way from companies, to books and performances.

Now that we have seen the base of our curriculum and what the college is about, it is appropriate to talk about the name. The college was named after Michael Polanyi, a well-known chemist that left the chemistry field right before winning a Nobel Prize, in order to follow his passion for social sciences. Some may ask if there is a relationship between science and philosophy, and although it might not seem like it, there is. Science is all about coming up with theories and to have enough curiosity to try to prove them right. It is the same thing for philosophy. You are curious, make up theories and try to solve them (although it could be in a different subject). So Michael Polanyi didn’t go so far as to change from one extreme to the other, he stayed within a similar field solving theories. So the reason of having Michael Polanyi’s name is that our questioning philosophy is derived from his and just as he followed his passion, so are we.

More than being an innovating way of learning the MPC also has a mission, a vision and goals. The MPC mission is the same one as the university’s: To teach and disseminate the ethical, legal, and economic principles of a society of free and responsible persons.

The MPC vision could be narrowed down to: Gathering sufficient knowledge of all subjects possible to be successful human beings in a way in which our actions and accomplishments become a good influence to others and society.

The MPC also has a certain purpose or certain goals to achieve, although more can be added along the way. Our main goals are:

* To create a replicable way of studying
* To generate a line of thoughts into ideas.
* To create a culture of inquiry.
* To be based on collective learning.
* To break barriers and paradigms.
* To find each true self.
* To create a new way of living and of communicating.