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The Life of the Mind

The founders of the great medieval universities of Europe always defined the academic life as a communal enterprise that was in a constant state of dialogue with the great ideas of antiquity as they were applied to the present. It is no wonder that they declared that universities are made of people, not buildings. The physical space that we occupy in a particular time and place is merely the setting for the real work of education: teachers and students searching for the truth; working through the great ideas and great books of the past; expanding the frontiers of the received body of knowledge; and daring to critique the ideas and texts of both the past and present as we strive to create our own intellectual legacy for future generations. In spite of the enormous achievements in information technology and the electronic wizardry that can be brought to the classroom, the life of the mind is at its core a very human enterprise. As the scholars of the first universities understood, we not only dispense knowledge as educators but kindle, as Plato said, the flame of learning; we develop deep and lasting habits of mind; we discover the inherent joy of learning; and equally important, we develop deep, loving and enduring friendships with kindred spirits.