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Celebrated author Susan Jacoby to speak at the U of L about the importance of a liberal education

Being a critical thinker in today's world is a necessity. Just look at the sheer volume of information that can be accessed through a single Internet search. How does one make sense of it all? What is fact and what is fiction?

Susan Jacoby, author of *The Age of American Unreason*, advises us to remember four simple words — garbage in, garbage out.

"A broad liberal arts education, which includes the sciences, matters more than ever precisely because technology is so powerful," she says. "Technology is a tool and can only do what humans have programmed it to do."

The smartphone is no more miraculous than the phone Alexander Graham Bell invented, although it can perform a broader range of tasks, she says. In the end, an idiotic text on a smartphone is no different than the same conversation on an old-fashioned telephone.

Jacoby argues that technology has encouraged intolerance of differing points of view. People tend to seek out information that reinforces their own point of view and the anonymity of the digital world encourages the notion that anonymous speech is free speech.

"The only free speech that matters is what people are willing to stand up and defend, under their own names," says Jacoby.

A liberal arts education, designed to give students a broad base of knowledge across disciplines and the ability to think critically and reason logically, prepares students for a broad range of careers.

"The essential thing we all must learn is how to be the masters of rather than slaves to technology."

Jacoby's talk, part of the Discovery Lecture Series, starts at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 10 in Room PE250 and is open to the public.

Jacoby is available for media interviews during the afternoon.

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