Interdisciplinary studies very important to Arts and Science

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SPRING WITHE

When first-years in Science or Engineering at U of A discover they’re required to take six credits of English, the reaction ranges from begrudging resignation to long-lasting resentment to waiting and grasping at teeth worse than when someone in “pro-life” flings O-chem. They’re right in pointing out that engineers and physicists are not going to be paid to analyze Shakespeare or Wordsworth on the job. Since the English requirement is widely seen as a job or an annoying hurdle on the way to graduation, it’s taken as a small, at-
temporary by the university policy makers to placate the last, fading advocates of a liberal education. But the six cred-

its of English required to get a degree at the U of A is not an arbitrary im-
position, but rather a signal to students to appreciate the limits of human knowledge and the dangers of putting yourself in a scholastic bubble. The sciences know a lot about the way the world works. So do the humanities. It’s time we started talking to each other.

Cross-discipline learning and re-
search is uncontroversial and bigh-
ter than even within the sciences — just look at the fields of chemical biology, biophysics, mathematical physics, mathematical biology and bioinformatics — not to mention the various cross-overs with engi-
neering, such as biological engi-
nearization. The Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies speaks for itself as the university’s commitment to an “interdisciplinary approach to scientific discovery that facilitates a substantial broadening of the intellectual and tech-
nical horizons as never before.” Likewise, it’s the united majority of humanities scholars already appreciate the broad overlaps between law, history, litera-
ture and so on.

And yet, Office for Interdisci-
plinary Studies is hidden in one dark corner of the Humanities Building. Surely it is not really housed in a microcollection of mid-departments like Comparative Literature and Religious Studies. While interdisciplinary studies are present within the sciences and the humanities — it seems to be that these two categories have shown a disturbing tendency to become even more separate in recent years. Subjects like linguistics, psychology and economics are desperate to become more interdisciplinary, and rational as the natural sciences during the secularization of Western society. And yet, you might just get a blank stare if you ask your physics professor about their epistemology.

It may come as a surprise, but there is such a thing as “philosophy of sci-
ence,” with origins going back to the ancient Greeks. The humanities have had an enormous effect on the nature and practice of scientific research, but those of us studying in the sci-
ences and engineering often treat the humanities as if their only value was in the vague “transferable skills” that apply to our own chosen disciplines. I’m not about writing better office memos or annual reports, it’s about asking questions. Honestly, I’d rather engineers take any English than just those “English for Engineers” cours-
es, which completely miss the point.

Science can tell us how to make tar sands extraction easier, but it can’t tell us why we’ve still so dependent on fossil fuels. We make enough ammounia to fertilize the world twice over, but we can’t manage the food distribution to end starvation. We’ve come a long way as a species, but it never hurts to examine our priori-
ties once in a while. Yes, science is interesting, but the enormous amount of time, money and resourc-
es consumed might be better spent. But that’s not something we can decide if the extent of a humanities education is learning how to write a business letter.

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Tom Axworthy
President and CEO of the Walter and
Duncan Gordon Foundation

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Date: February 21, 2013
Time: 6:20 p.m. – 6:40 p.m.
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Would you please stop wearing that awful shirt. You look like the Goodwill Ambassador for Goodwill.

When I am sitting alone in HUB, I do not want some stupid asshole stranger sit to next to me. Please goode.

I like Daisy, but he is a total prick.

The only time my girlfriend gives me oral sex is when she tells me to go fuck myself. I am sad.

Don’t bad mouth your friends behind their backs. It makes you look like an asshole and you are an asshole.

I had an awesome Christmas. You just sucked hind tit.

One thought he was invincible, the other thought he could fly. They were both wrong.

I like to masturbate watching Dr Phil.

Don’t blink.

Reading week come quick

I want to be a fashion designer.

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