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Bill Newell Announces Retirement as AIS Executive Director: Tributes and Testimonials

By Julie Thompson Klein
Wayne State University

Former president of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies Ray Miller put it best: "There would be no AIS without Bill." After serving as Executive Director for 24 years, and de facto Executive Director for another 9, the venerable William H. Newell retired from his position in summer of 2016. Over the course of his career, Newell was instrumental in advancing interdisciplinary studies, beginning with the launching of AIS in 1979. To honor him, current members of the AIS Board and former presidents offered testimonials, joined by former editor of the journal, *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*, Stan Bailis.



Bill Newell The Professor and the Executive Director

Bill Newell is Emeritus Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Miami University and a founding faculty member of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies, known originally as the Western College Program. He holds a PhD in economics from the University of Pennsylvania and an AB in philosophy from Amherst Col-

lege. Prior to his appointment at Miami University, Newell taught economics and interdisciplinary social science for a year at Temple University and was a tutor for four years in the Paracollege at St. Olaf College. Over the course of his career, he edited two books—the 1998

Interdisciplinarity: Essays from the Literature and the 2011 *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research* (with Allen Repko and Rick Szostak)—as well as three special issues of the AIS journal. He also authored more than 30 articles and chapters, while serving as a consultant and external evaluator over 100 times.

In recognition of these accomplishments, AIS conferred the highest honor for interdisciplinarians on Newell in 2003, the Kenneth E. Boulding Award, which recognizes major and long-term contributions to advancing interdisciplinarity through teaching, scholarship, and/or community involvement. Bill's qualifications for the Award are evident in even a glimpse of his duties as Executive Director:

- **Providing Leadership:** conferring with the AIS Leadership Team, the Board, and standing committees about projects and administrative matters;
- **Maintaining Organizational Records:** managing routine business and correspondence, tax records, the treasury, the website

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domain, and the INTERDIS listserv;

- **Managing the AIS Office:** administering the original AIS home at Miami University in Ohio and transitioning to the new home base at Oakland University in Michigan;

- **Overseeing Outreach:** handling affiliations of organizations and networks with related interests including general and liberal studies, team science, transdisciplinary research, integration and implementation sciences;

- **Training Consultants:** offering workshops prior to and at annual conferences and training new prospects for the AIS consulting team.

As Ray Miller emphasized, his duties also included sustained support for all publications. Bill served as editor of the newsletter for many years, edited the journal on multiple occasions, and, Ray added, “facilitated the actual printing when other options were lost.” An even fuller picture emerges when appreciating Bill’s role as founder and anchor of AIS.

Bill Newell

The Founder

and Organizational Anchor

Veterans of the early years of AIS recalled its founding. Former president Tom Murray came to know Newell as a colleague in the Western College Program. From the beginning, Murray remembered, “His energy, enthusiasm and determination were astounding.” Their conversations nurtured a combination of intellectual companionship and personal friendship that current president Machiel Keestra praised as well, recollecting count-

Bill Newell (right) and former AIS president Michael Field enjoy some wine in the early days of AIS. Newell is retiring after 24 years as Executive Director of AIS.



less conversations Machiel and Bill had ranging from AIS business to music, basketball, and family life. Murray’s successor as president, Tom Benson, also recalled Bill’s success in recruiting and motivating others to join his vision for AIS: “He found a way to enlist us in his cause and it became our own.” Bill’s personality, Benson added, stood out: “He was witty, sometimes brash, energetic, insightful, and deeply devoted to the development of the AIS.” When consider-

“He found a way to enlist us in his cause and it became our own... He was witty, sometimes brash, energetic, insightful, and deeply devoted to the development of the AIS.”

Tom Benson

ing the long list of presidents and board members over 37 years, Benson concluded, Bill’s “visionary work in founding and sustaining a unique and valuable organization sets him apart,” and indeed “forms the heart of his exceptional legacy.”

Another founding member and president of AIS, Nelson Bingham, recounted Bill’s determination to provide a forum for interdisciplinary studies. The idea appealed to many but, Bingham stressed, there is “no doubt that the core vision sprang from Bill’s mind.” In the late 1970s, Nelson recalled, a growing number of professional organizations embodied interdisciplinary approaches with a topical focus, utilizing methods of various disciplines and theoretical models. Yet, overlaps and communication were lacking across organizations. AIS was the first group to focus on integration, and Bill, Bingham added,

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was the “constant thread running through all activities”—in essence “the DNA of AIS.” Its vitality today, Nelson concluded, “is a direct reflection of Bill’s commitment and boundless energy in enacting that vision.”

Ray Miller, who has known Newell since 1981, likewise highlighted his steadfast personal commitment to the organization: “When other people dropped the ball, Bill was there.” When another former president, Carolyn Haynes, announced a strategic planning retreat in 2003 to consider what to do in the event he stepped down as Executive Director, Ray told her the purpose of strategic planning should be “finding the 15 competent and dedicated people who would be needed when Bill eventually retired.”

**Bill Newell
The Mentor**

An even fuller picture emerges from tributes to Newell’s mentoring. Cheryl Jacobsen, another former president, called to mind numerous conferences, Board meetings, workshops, a shared consultancy, and the strategic planning retreat marked by heady

“... the purpose of strategic planning should be ‘finding the 15 competent and dedicated people who would be needed when Bill eventually retired.’”

Carolyn Haynes

theorizing laced with memories of 1970s idealism, youthful antics, and breaking “disciplinary rules” – all capped by Bill’s signature love of good wine.

For Jacobsen, AIS became a welcoming professional and personal community and Bill in particular, she remembered, “opened the door to my greater involvement in other higher education organizations.” He also encouraged scholarly projects that led Cheryl to “a more nuanced understanding of how disciplines and interdisciplinarity ‘work’ within institutions.”

Others, as well, paid tribute to Newell’s help and encouragement in their early days of involvement. Former president Pauline Gagnon recalled being a newly minted Director of Interdisciplinary Studies. By her own admission, Gagnon had no concept of what that title meant. The IDS Reader Bill created for the Institute in Integrative Studies that he ran from 1992-1998 proved invaluable. Like Pauline, outgoing Board member Marcus Tanner also admitted having “no idea what I was doing or really what was expected of me” when he arrived at Texas Tech University. Hired on July 1st, Marcus had to prepare a series of four courses in an Integrative Studies program to begin August 25th. When they met for the first time, Marcus was struck by how Bill made him feel part of the organization, introducing him to others, and motivating him to make significant changes to the curriculum.

Outgoing Board member Tami Carmichael joined the others in praising Newell’s mentoring, in a unique and compelling memory. Carmichael had read Bill’s work for

The richness and depth of interdisciplinary integration from students’ first to senior years . . . is a testament to Bill’s influences as a mentor as well as a teacher and a scholar.

Karen Moranski

years, but did not interact personally until he rejected an article she submitted to Issues. The rejection, however, was so “thorough and helpful” it informed her revision of a component of the first-year interdisciplinary program at the University of North Dakota. The revision also led to a new assessment program building on data about the success of interdisciplinary learning and eventually an article in Issues. Moreover, Tami was able to make persuasive arguments for her program’s survival in the face of budget shortfalls and continued to benefit from Bill’s feedback on a variety of professional endeavors. His mentoring, she concluded, “made all the difference” to both her professional development and the life of the first-year program.

Former president Karen Moranski also paid tribute to Bill’s role as a mentor. Like others, she described as those “who have toiled in the vineyards of interdisciplinary research and teaching,” Moranski found the anthology of readings he published to be invaluable. Her own copy was passed around campus so many times it fell apart but, with the aid of rubber bands, stayed in circulation. Most of all,

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Karen said eloquently, Bill taught them “how to do interdisciplinarity with purpose, discipline(s), and integrity.” When she and her colleagues were floundering to create a new interdisciplinary general education curriculum, Newell teamed with Joan Fiscella, arriving on campus as “a tall IDS Mr. Fix-It.” Together they “firmly but always collegially turned our program around,” including resuscitating courses that were still going strong 14 years later. The richness and depth of interdisciplinary integration from students’ first to senior years, Karen added, is a testament to Bill’s influences as a mentor as well as a teacher and a scholar.

**Bill Newell
The Man**

The full measure of individuals lies in the composite of their defining qualities. Several stand out. Former president and current member of the Leadership Team, Roz Schindler, told Bill in remarks shared for this story, “You have truly been the heart, mind, soul, and conscience of AIS,” combining breath and depth of commitment over decades with skills of connection-making and mentoring. Reflecting on the multiple qualities he too observed, Stan Bailis acknowledged, it is “not an easy bundle of attributes to have.” Although he had worked with Bill more than a decade, Stan really came to know him during spring semester of 1994 when he was a visiting professor in the Western College Program. Spending time together almost every day afforded a complete picture of a man who

“He had the heart and soul of a master teacher. . . He was never too busy to review ideas, offer thoughts, and carefully nurture me along the way. He was and is a master mentor.”

Don Stowe

was “smart, focused, determined, devoted, and tireless.” Working together closely also gave Stan an understanding of how Bill expresses those attributes in everything he does: “everything” from founding AIS to nurturing it through the decades to this day.

The word “inspiration” also stood out. Marcus Tanner credited Newell’s seminal work and demeanor as “a great inspiration to me professionally and personally.” Nelson Bingham dubbed him a role model for a professional vocation dedicated to integrating scholarship, pedagogy, and application with personal networks of friendships and fellowship. And, current editor of the AIS newsletter James Welch wrote, Bill “epitomized what an interdisciplinarian can be.” Current Board member Tanya Augsburg, in turn, cited his spirit of intellectual curiosity: “Bill could always be seen at AIS roaming the halls, intrigued by new ideas and theories about interdisciplinarity.” In her particular case, Tanya valued Bill’s encouragement when she was a lecturer trying to write the first edition of her textbook *Becoming Interdisciplinary*, and continuing afterwards: “His

sage wisdom and problem solving skills helped me overcome some challenging ‘politics of interdisciplinary studies.’”

The qualities of “generosity” and “kindness” were striking as well. Pauline Gagnon attributed Bill’s generosity to “a willingness to help you address questions and concerns no matter where you were from or what you knew.” Long-standing members, including former president Michael Field, benefited from Bill’s encouragement, in Michael’s case guiding him “to expand interests in academic assessment of interdisciplinary programs, work collaboratively with AIS colleagues, and find connections between individuals and areas of study.” Bill’s generosity, former president Rick Szostak added, extended to paying for graduate students’ dinners at conferences and infusing Board



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meetings with bottles of wine from his personal cellar. Pauline added “kindness,” a quality new Board member Heidi Upton echoed. Bill’s kindness towards Heidi at mid-year Board meetings and openness on all occasions made her feel included. Reading other tributes from the early history of AIS for this story also made Heidi appreciate more deeply “his passion for teaching and learning and the spaces in-between.”

And the beat goes on, across generations... Like others, former president Don Stowe recalled being “thrust unwittingly into the world of interdisciplinarity,” during the early 1980s when the Provost at the University of South Carolina declared all general studies programs in the system would henceforth be called “interdisciplinary studies programs.” With some trepidation Don contacted Bill, only to discover quickly, as others have, Bill was approachable: “He had the heart and soul of a master teacher.” Don added, “He was never too busy to review ideas, offer thoughts, and carefully nurture me along the way. He was and is a master mentor.” Don has had the pleasure, too, of watching Bill welcome his son, Drew Stowe, into the “intellectual

“AIS ‘would simply not exist without Bill’s tireless dedication over four decades.’ His intellectual leadership played a key role . . . in helping to define interdisciplinarity, seek its defining characteristics, and identify strategies for integration.”

Rick Szostak

web” of AIS, as Drew moved from being a graduate student member to an assistant professor now.

James Welch concurred with Don’s sense of being put at ease. As a self-described “naïve grad student,” he was surprised by Newell’s accessibility, even shocked Bill engaged him in prolonged conversation. James also came to appreciate that openness is a hallmark of AIS, shaped in no small part by Bill’s conviction to make the organization into more than a forum and platform for interdisciplinarity, to make it a place to flourish. Interdisciplinary, Welch reflected, “are often eclectic, eccentric, and perhaps even erratic.” But, AIS became a home that “prizes open-mindedness, mutual respect, and support.” James also found Bill’s vision of interdisciplinarity to be “a powerful approach to knowledge and complex problem solving,” amplified by exploring theoretical implications in a manner that would balance “the imperative for open-mindedness and diversity with the need for structure and

cohesion.” This balancing act is not without controversy, but it offered a framework for deep and productive debate within the AIS community about the nature and practice of interdisciplinary studies.

Traits associated with “tenacity” also stood out. Szostak declared AIS “would simply not exist without Bill’s tireless dedication over four decades.” His intellectual leadership played a key role, Rick explained, “in helping to define interdisciplinarity, seek its defining characteristics, and identify strategies for integration.” Comparably, former president Joan Fiscella highlighted the enduring strength of Bill’s “vision and conviction,” grounded in a keen sense of what the organization should be while remaining open to suggestions as new members arrived. Bill always sought ways to involve them, identifying new candidates for reviewing books and writing stories for the newsletter. In her case, Joan added, AIS was also a welcoming professional home when she was making a personal transition to a career in academic libraries. Szostak pointed to an added trait of tenacity as well, remembering Bill could be “notoriously stubborn in Board meetings,” insisting on clarity and cogent analysis without sacrificing professional and personal relationships. “A great heart

Newell’s vision of interdisciplinarity: “a powerful approach to knowledge and complex problem solving,” amplified by exploring theoretical implications in a manner that would balance “the imperative for open-mindedness and diversity with the need for structure and cohesion.”

James Welch

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and strong mind,” Rick reflected, “are a powerful combination.” Moranski cited the same quality: “He stubbornly and persistently demands from all of us our best interdisciplinary and integrative thinking while wining and dining us with his intellect and humanity.” Current Board member Gretchen Schulz, added the value of collaboration. Taking a cue from the Summer 2016 Rio Olympics, she cited Michael Phelps saying, after winning his final race, “Thanks, Coach.” His coach helped him learn to enjoy collaboration with members of the relay team in that race, appreciating joint effort more than solo achievements alone. Schulz drew a parallel to her career in English, where solo achievements in teaching, publishing, and presenting at conferences were prioritized. Over several decades, though, she experienced collaboration in the world of theater, mounting Shakespeare plays, then becoming involved in AIS. When asked to chair a committee to investigate introducing interdisciplinary coursework on her campus, Gretchen persuaded colleagues to attend one of Bill’s summer institutes. “Coach Newell” guided them, and others, in working together on challenges they faced. Gretchen subsequently co-hosted an annual conference at

Emory University and is now co-editing the AIS journal aided by Bill’s counsel. Like Michael Field, who came to “recognize the pleasure and simple fun of working with others on complex problems,” Gretchen has been the beneficiary of what she called the “Newell Nurturing Technique.”

My personal sense of the man echoes dual qualities others have identified: steadfast commitment to his vision coupled with generosity towards newcomers. When a former colleague of mine at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Nepal visited the US to learn about interdisciplinary programs, Bill responded graciously to my query about whether he, Shreedhar Lohani, might spend a short time in residence at Miami University. When Shreedhar heard Bill and I had been invited to co-author the chapter on interdisciplinary studies for the 1996 Handbook on the Undergraduate Curriculum, he remarked, “How is that possible? The two of you don’t agree on anything.” Bill and I shared a common passion for interdisciplinarity. But we had different trajectories: his centered on activities that advanced AIS as a dedicated professional organization and mine evolving across inter- and trans-disciplinary networks and literatures. We worked together, though, on a number of AIS projects, and the chapter for the Handbook reflects the strength

A Limerick on Bill Newell’s Retirement

by Gretchen Schulz

*There once was a prof name of Newell
Found bonds of one discipline cruel,
So he birthed AIS,
Led us out of duress
To revel in freedom from rules.*

that comes of working together on a common goal.

Moreover, as vicissitudes of life confronted us personally, our friendship has been a bedrock, even as Shreedhar would have predicted we continue to spar on our intellectual differences.

Finally...what next? As AIS refigures the Leadership Team in the wake of Newell’s retirement, it will be making a step Bill himself described in his formal letter of resignation, moving “from gestation and infancy to maturation.”

Even though he is stepping away from the directorship and the team, however, he will continue to serve as a reviewer for the journal and as treasurer until a replacement is named.

Beyond that, it is not difficult to imagine Don Stowe’s image of the future: “Henceforth I look forward to watching Bill move quickly and purposefully among all the participants at conferences—welcoming them, listening to their concerns, inviting them to delve more deeply into the realm of interdisciplinarity and ultimately inspiring some to bring us to new levels of appreciation and understanding of that ubiquitous term, ‘interdisciplinarity.’” So do we all.

A Double Dactyl
by Gretchen Schulz

*Higgledy-Piggledy,
William H. Newell, the
Founder of AIS,
Kowtowed to none.*

*Rather he urged us all,
“Challenge the disciplined;
Heterodoxically
Fight till you’ve won.”*

Collaborative External Review: An Emerging Model

by

Robin DeRosa, Director of Interdisciplinary Studies, Plymouth State University
Timothy T. Stoller, Director of Delta College, SUNY College at Brockport

We've likely all been in this situation: it's time to assess our Interdisciplinary Studies program. We write our self-study, engage our university stakeholders in evaluation and planning, and invite an external reviewer to campus to outline our strengths and challenges. For those of us who chair or coordinate college-level Interdisciplinary Studies programs, we are used to collaborating at every stage of our work, from planning our curriculum with our advisory councils to partnering with administrators to build the special structures that our programs might need, to advising students across a wide variety of disciplines and methodologies.

When it comes to program assessment, however, we haven't necessarily achieved widespread commitment to collaborative approaches. In this short reflection, the two of us want to share our experiences doing a collaborative external review of a university IDS program. We were each invited to assess the program at SUNY Polytechnic Institute, as the university required two outside perspectives. When we inquired about whether or not we could work collaboratively, the IDS coordinator at SUNY Poly, Daryl Lee, determined that without strict guidelines prohibiting such approaches, we were free to work together. The collaboration turned out to be very fruitful, and we'd like to walk through some of the highlights and challenges here so that others might consider undertaking a collaborative review.

The first thing we considered when proposing that we handle the review collaboratively was why? What did we expect to get out of a collaborative process? There were two main answers to this question. First, we hoped to build a process consistent with the foundational principles of Interdisciplinary Studies as a field. Approaching the review as a dialectical conversation between two different reviewers would encourage us to consider alternative perspectives and avoid excessive reliance on a single master narrative. By bringing our expertise into dialogue, we relied on our experience and our fresh perspectives without assuming our own home programs or protocols were necessarily the best or most applicable models. Second, we hoped to maximize efficiency, opening space and time for more thoughtful and in-depth analyses of the program we were reviewing. By dividing some tasks and sharing writing duties, we were able to focus, play to our own strengths, and offer maximum con-

sideration to the program under review despite our busy schedules as working professors chairing programs of our own.

We came together as a team thanks to AIS. Daryl had met us both at the last AIS annual conference, and had been interested in work we were each doing at our home institutions. He reached out independently to each of us, and then we worked as a group to develop the collaborative plan. However, in many cases, external reviewers will be solicited for solo work. We recommend asking the contracting institution if they would be open to a collaborative review, and whether or not there would be funding available for such a process. Emphasizing the strengths of receiving multiple—though integrated—perspectives; the ethos of Interdisciplinary Studies as a highly collaborative field; and the potential to be part of an innovative new way to develop inquiry-based assessment models could help

make the case. But planning ahead is crucial. Using time at AIS conferences to build relationships with potential collaborators, staying connected with IDS colleagues across social media platforms, and adding to your

list of possible review partners as you learn of successful programs and innovative critical thinkers in the field will help you be prepared to offer suggestions when you are contacted about a possible reviewing job.

So, how did we actually go about conducting a collaborative review? To begin with, we each read through the SUNY Poly self-study ahead of time, noting issues, questions, and clarifications to discuss. Then, we agreed to meet together before the actual review got underway. At this meeting, we took the time to inquire about each other's programs and to grow comfortable with one another. We then turned to sharing our first reactions to the self-study report. Interestingly enough we both picked up on a number of the same issues, found ourselves asking identical questions, and desiring similar clarifications. This experience reinforced our conviction that a collaborative review would prove beneficial. It also helped us to develop a consistent picture of the institutional context. We then dug more deeply into the presenting materials. We asked each other what sort of first impressions we had—of the program's strengths and weaknesses, recurring problems, opportunities and challenges, etc. This enabled us to head

By dividing some tasks and sharing writing duties, we were able to focus, play to our own strengths, and offer maximum consideration to the program under review . . .

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Part II

“Approaches to Knowledge – The Play”

by Carl Gombrich

Programme Director • Arts and Sciences (BASc) • University College, London

Publisher’s Note:

Because of space limitations in the newsletter, this play has been published in two parts: Part I appeared in the June 2016 issue. Part II appears in this issue.

Recap:

The author has noted that this play is intended “as a pedagogical tool for 1st year undergraduates in a Liberal Arts and Sciences programme.” Part of its mission, he writes, is to teach about . . . different approaches to knowledge . . . , [including]:

- *“that any particular discipline, or ‘approach to knowledge,’ is more foundational (and thus ‘important’) than any other;*
- *that knowledge itself is best thought of in ‘disciplinary’ terms;*
- *that approaching problems through single disciplinary lenses may be the most productive way to advance knowledge.”*

In the Author’s Note to the play, he explains that “each character (an academic) argues that, in some important way, their discipline is more “foundational” and therefore of more epistemological or societal importance than other disciplines . . . The discussion is lightly mediated by a Conference Organizer who, throughout most of the piece, does not have a view on the matter but is open being persuaded by any of the academics. In the end, however, the Conference Organiser wonders if this claiming of priority is the most helpful way to approach a discussion about knowledge. He offers the possibility of a different , higher perspective in which all disciplines are valued, all can be problem-focused, and none can claim unproblematically to be foundational.”

He notes that “I have found this an attractive way to introduce 1st year undergraduates to the potential value of interdisciplinary study and research . . . , adding that “to date, the play has been performed three times in a lecture theatre – once with professional actors situated among students in the audience, and twice with students taking the lead roles.”

He points out that the play “can also be read as part of a seminar, which affords the advantage that the material can be analysed more closely.”

In Part I, Professors Neuroscience, Physics, Mathematics, and Linguistics presented their arguments. In Part II, the remaining characters add their voices to the discussion. The scene is the large lounge of a conference venue, somewhere in the world. Tables and chairs are arranged ballroom-style or lecture theatre style.

Approaches to Knowledge – The Play

Part II

Part II Characters

- Conference Organiser
- Dr. Philosophy
- Prof. Engineering
- Dr. Economics
- Dr. Politics
- Dr. Geography
- Dr. Anthropology
- Prof. English Literature and the Arts
- Dr. Medicine
- Prof. History

Continued from June Newsletter:

Dr. Philosophy: In some sense you are all right, but all of this discussion is absorbed at a higher level in what we might call philosophy. Philosophy need have no fight with any of you, because you are all born of philosophy at some point in the intellectual history of your subject.

Philosophy and philosophers, from the earliest Greek times, through the Renaissance and up to the 20th century, have been free to let their thoughts roam where they please. The results of this exploring are the greatest intellectual and practical achievements of human history. Philosophy grants freedom to the mind to explore the

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highest and deepest regions of our thinking. It is truly fundamental and precedes all other fields. Philosophy gave us Politics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Computers, Ethics, Aesthetics, Law—all of it.

One great philosopher—I think it was Bertrand Russell—said that philosophy is the study of the most general truths of reality—or something like that. More recently, an Oxford philosopher, Anthony Kenny, said that philosophy is there at the birth of every new subject (I paraphrase): ‘all academic disciplines are born of Philosophy and only leave and set up house on their own, as it were, when they are mature enough to do so’.

Certainly philosophy can be said to study knowledge itself—in just one branch of it, called epistemology. But Philosophy encompasses far more than just a study of knowledge. Because of its breadth and generality it can therefore be said to be the most important of human activities without which no progress in knowledge, any knowledge, can happen.

Finally, may I add that as well as providing the spring, the source for all the greatest human ideas and achievements, in the overarching philosophical approach we are able to move closest to what we might call wisdom. This seeking of wisdom has been a major strand of philosophical traditions in Asia, The Islamic World, Ancient Greece, Renaissance Europe and elsewhere—and can be said to be alive in branches of academic philosophy today. Wisdom is the ground for all worthwhile life, both for the

individual and for the human race as a whole.

Professor Engineering: Oh come on! Philosophy is thought without action, it is problem-solving in a vacuum—and what use is that? It is in grave danger of being fundamentally sterile—one might almost say useless. It is not philosophers, but rather engineers who have always addressed the real needs of mankind and fought for solutions. Without canals, boats, wheels, roads, houses, engines, developments in materials, electrical devices, communications—right the way up to the most modern applications of technology—there simply would be nothing to call civilization without engineers. Even the great religious symbols: cathedrals, mosques and temples, depend almost entirely on great engineering.

Engineering is what delivers real change, real benefits to people’s lives. Engineers confront problems, real issues that people want solved. The work of engineers allows economies to grow and gives solutions that alleviate pain and inspire greater exploration of this planet and the wider universe; and engineers use man’s greatest gift—our problem-solving abilities – to make things which alter all our lives for the better.

I bet you didn’t know that the Latin root for the word ‘engineer’ is the same as the root for ‘ingenuity’! Engineers are creators, designers, world-shapers. They are the great builders of civilization, progress and emancipation. Without engineers there would be nothing to show for any thought, any theories, any abstractions.

Conference Organiser: Well, thank you. There are some great ideas flying around here. Personally, I’m thinking, ‘I must study this, then that. Oh! This is most important—No! That is...’ It is hard to say after listening to your opening remarks which discipline really is most important. Based on what we have heard so far, can we say which sort of knowledge is most likely to change the world for the better?

I think there’s a strong case to be made, however, that the view of a ‘person-in-the-street’ might be that Economics is currently the dominant paradigm. I mean so many questions, about what is the right thing to do, in education, health, politics etc. are couched in economic terms. It all comes down to economics, doesn’t it? Certainly the news is often dominated by a discussion of economics. So my colleague here might appear to be at an unfair advantage in arguing his case. Dr. Economics, what do you say to that?

Dr. Economics: Well, public perceptions or not, I must confess that I think all of my colleagues who spoke previously are missing something vital. All that they talk about depends on there being a stable society in which the sort of thinking and the sort of developments in knowledge they envisage—in neurology, philosophy, engineering, linguistics, whatever—can thrive. When mankind is living hand to mouth in a barbarous existence, only one step away from starvation, depending on the weather or avoiding predators so as not to be exterminated,

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all your talk of great achievements and advancing of knowledge is just a dream. Fundamentally, nothing happens without an organised society, and the essential thing on which all such societies depend is economics. It is hard to remember in our culture, here in 21st century Britain, that the great wonders of our modern world rest on the ability we have to trade, to produce goods which we can exchange for other goods in order to increase our wealth and well-being. And of course we can now transfer that wealth and store its value by the extraordinary invention which is money. All of this is economics.

This is particularly poignant to think about now as we are haunted by the possibility of another gigantic economic crash, a crash like the one that saw tens of thousands starve in the US in the 1930s and which led to the Second World War in which millions were killed. You may not believe it, but very few people believed anything was wrong before previous disastrous crashes, either. That is in the nature of crashes. Unless we gain knowledge of our economic nature and use this understanding to stabilise the world, all your other stuff is just talk. There will be no opportunity for your elegant discussions when society disintegrates, anarchy reigns and you do not have enough to eat—and fear for your life and the life of your families.

Dr. Politics: You know, doctor, I agree sincerely with some of your analysis, gloomy as it is: nothing of human value can be created or can

endure without stable societies – and I am also concerned about the future of the world and the fragility of the global economic system. But I think your emphasis is wrong. It is not economics that comes first, but an understanding of politics.

Politics is sometimes described as the study of power, but power in this context has wide-reaching meaning. Fundamentally it is about how groups organise themselves and accomplish things as a group so that the individuals in the group benefit. These power structures can start out as relatively simple—the mother in a family, the chief of a village—and end up immensely sophisticated, such as in the Separation of Powers on which British and US democracy depend. But it is these structures and ways of organising human groups that allow the sort of economic flourishing you refer to.

The influence of politics is subtle but deep and pervasive. You may not appreciate it, but even in our seemingly gentle world of academia, a great deal of what we do is determined by politics. Who pays for the research you do? Who decides that? The government? Or maybe the ‘internal politics’ of your university? All such decisions are political and they can determine the very course of knowledge itself.

I agree that everything the rest of our colleagues have talked about is not possible without stable society, but I would argue that stable society depends fundamentally on deepening our knowledge of the workings of politics. The discipline of politics precedes that of economics.

Conference Organiser: I really

will try to remain impartial here, but I guess I have to point out that in the history of what society thinks is worthwhile to study, which discipline or disciplines should dominate, there are noticeable phases, even fashions. It really is fashionable now to think that economics is of central importance, but we mustn't forget that only 12 years ago there was a massive ‘computer science’ bubble and everyone thought that computer sciences was the thing to study. Previous periods have placed an emphasis on engineering and even classics. I'm not at all saying economics isn't vitally important—I really think it is—but history is weighing in with economics at the moment so in the name of balance I should offer a little historic perspective here and point out that it was not always so and almost certainly will not be so again in the future. But I see Dr. Geography, you are bursting to get in. Please...

Dr. Geography: I'm afraid I must admit that to me you all seem a bit narrow-minded, stuck, somewhat, in your own particular disciplines. None of you is able to take the kind of over-arching and comprehensive view that a study like geography allows you. You will all be familiar with the fact that geography divides classically into two parts: Human Geography and Physical Geography. This means that the scope of knowledge associated with geography is immense; it can literally cover everything of importance to humankind and his physical environment. In the work of a great geographer like David Harvey you find the sort of vision and the comprehensive under-

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standing of human movements and environmental change that is most likely to contribute to solving the world's great problems. And, after all, that is why we are gathered here today.

Geography, of course, is highly interdisciplinary. It has a healthy disregard for artificial boundaries in knowledge and as such is best placed to solve the problems of the modern world. It does this, not on the basis of some bureaucratic university boundaries, but by addressing real world problems of people and their environment and using all tools at its disposal to attack these problems.

Dr. Anthropology: It is interesting, Dr. Geography, to hear you define geography in such sweeping terms and to crown your subject as, in some way, the most interdisciplinary. I don't wish to deny the interdisciplinary nature of geography but I have heard it said that geography, while being interdisciplinary, lacks a focus because its sweep is so broad.

Now anthropology is truly interdisciplinary, drawing, as it does on biology, history, archaeology, sociology, cultural studies and other disciplines. It can even be said to draw on geography, but it has a centre, a clear focus: at its core is the study of humankind. This focus helps us to concentrate the thinking and allows us to use many other disciplines to gain knowledge of the human and her society, her culture, her origins and her future.

You, my neuroscience friend, have spoken of the need to un-

derstand human behaviour as the great challenge for humankind—and I agree with you. But we need a broader approach than reductionist neuroscience allows. For example it was through the great anthropological pioneers of the last century that we learnt about cultures in which many social norms we take for granted—like how society can be organised, kinship, sexuality, even visual perception—how these things can be altered by the circumstances we are born into. If we really wish to understand human nature in this age of globalisation, we need an anthropological approach to knowledge.

Conference Organiser: Thank you colleagues. This is the first time we have heard the word 'interdisciplinary' in our discussion. Now I am aware that some of our delegates may be predisposed to interdisciplinarity and therefore may favour your way of thinking. In the interests of balance, then, I would like to point out that both anthropology and geography are really quite well established disciplines within most universities. It is true that they may both draw on a range of other approaches to further their research, but this is also true of many other disciplines. In this context I think we must allow that there is not necessarily anything especially interdisciplinary about these subjects which sets them above the rest. Both of these disciplines are well established in a way that, say, Behavioural Economics and Gaming are not. I don't think we should allow to pass without serious scrutiny that any established university department is more interdisciplinary than another.

But I can see our colleague from Literature and the Arts is looking more and more puzzled by the discussion and would like to say something. Professor Literature...

Prof. English Literature and the Arts: Thank you. Frankly, I can't help thinking that anyone listening in to this conversation so far—those people out there [indicates public]—would be a bit amazed by what they have heard—and somewhat nonplussed. They would think that you are all completely missing the point. Sure, it is important to theorise about the sorts of things you talk about and even, if you are an engineer or some other more practical person, to get things done. But these are not the things which make our lives worth living.

When you look back on your lives, it is not abstractions and theories that will fill your memories, but things lived, things felt. It will be the first time you fell in love; your first kiss with that boy from the sixth form, the sweetness of it, the way he tasted of strawberries; you will remember the time you stood on the edge of that escarpment of red stone, thousands of miles away from home, where, hundreds of feet below you the green and yellow plains rolled out into the distance below warm and golden skies—and that air, that air of freedom which filled your body, let loose your mind; it will be the memory of the time you saw the great band on their last tour before the singer died, you were covered in mud and drunk and so happy; and you will remember the best times you had with your children, their birthdays, their lovely play with language, their crazy obses-

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sions with little plastic characters, playing junior tennis in the park, going swimming with them, and getting furious when they stayed out all night.

In all these things, it is the internal, the emotional life that guides us, that drives us and ultimately determines whether we live happy and fulfilled lives or not. And all of these experiences are enriched and developed in us by the Arts. Literature, music, painting—these are wonders of human creation that allow us to see ourselves as humans with purpose and meaning. Life without such arts is, literally, unimaginable; for it is the arts which facilitate the flourishing of the imagination and the inner life which makes us human.

It is only by immersing ourselves in the arts, living with them, absorbing them and experiencing their qualities and their flow that we come to know ourselves and to live the lives we want to live. You can call this knowledge of the self, if you like, or simply knowledge of what it is to be human: the human condition—but it is this knowledge which differentiates a life well-lived, a life fulfilled, from a mere passing, empty, machine-like existence.

Conference Organiser: Hm-mm. Thank you...

Dr. Medicine: A lovely speech, Professor English Literature: really. I agree with a lot of your analysis of how to find meaning in life but I must strike a note of caution: it is not always clear that in the some-

what dry, academic study of the arts one meets at university one has the sort of life-changing exposure to creativity and the inner universe you describe.

But be that as it may, it is striking that in your speech on fulfilment you did not mention a particular human quality: compassion. Compassion is the highest goal of many spiritual systems—of course, St. Paul talks about it in the Bible where it is often translated as ‘charity’—and compassion, the desire to help others and alleviate their suffering, is the core mission of Medicine and those concerned with the health of others.

The student of medicine and health in general combines the central humanistic impulses with the deepest scientific ones.

One cannot do worthwhile work in this area without a deep understanding of genetics, biology and chemistry to inform the science of what one does. These sciences are in some ways more new than physics and there are therefore more great and unanswered questions to explore: What is life? What is the role of humans in this world? Do we have moral duties towards other forms of life? What is more, we increasingly understand the role that politics, economics and sociology play in health: Why do educated people lead more healthy lives? How can we best provide for a child’s health, both here in the UK and abroad? Such questions are now a central part of the study of health. You cannot approach them without also having a grasp of philosophy, the arts, society and the wider issues of what it means to be human.

Medicine and a life devoted to the study of health thus combine

the deepest issues of thought with the action needed to serve the most pressing needs of humanity. We cure people and prevent illness and disease. We alleviate suffering and allow people and their communities to flourish. Such a study is comprehensive—and this approach to knowledge is the best way to attain the highest human goal of compassion for others.

Prof. History: I have been wanting to interject for a while, but I have enjoyed each of your contributions. In some respects I agree with all of you. But it is clear, I’m afraid, that you all lack perspective; you all come at your subject as if it were the only thing that matters, just now, as it were. And, of course, this is the wrong way to look at it. The disciplines you speak of, indeed, the very thoughts and viewpoints you speak of, all have a history; and it is only through history that we come to understand how we are where we are today, and thus to think about where we might go in the future.

You can apply history to every aspect of human life. Everything has a history. It is thus truly universal; it is the human story.

I’m constantly reminded of the importance of a historical perspective. Just a couple of weeks ago a friend of mine described how she had tried to discuss with some evolutionary biologists the origin of the concept of altruism, which they were looking at in evolutionary terms. They looked at her as if she was mad—but surely, if you are not aware of the origins of the ideas you work with; your understanding will be greatly limited! You can

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hardly research a concept which has not been invented yet and, conversely, if you are not aware of the histories of the concepts you work with your understanding of them will be impoverished!

Without the sense of perspective that history gives, the sense of the narrative of human culture and the development of thought, you will only have superficial understanding of your disciplines; you will, in fact, not have a full understanding of the reasons that led you to the beliefs and values that you hold today.

Dr. Medicine: ...well I don't want to deny the importance of History but you leave out so many important things in your analysis...

[We then return to the Neuroscience character who embarks on a similar speech to his first intervention before being interrupted in some way to show that this cycle of argument should be stopped].

Prof. Neuroscience: History, Medicine, all of you! I come back to the simple truism that it is only through your brain that you can analyse or have knowledge of anything at all—anything to do with history, medicine, philosophy, physics, whatever—all the things we have talked about; and it is only through understanding your brain that we can hope to understand the origins and consequences of human actions, the very stuff of history, the very foundations of medicine...

Prof. Physics: Yes, but as I said,

the brain is made of physics things so...

Prof. Mathematics: Hold on, even you agree that physics is just applied mathematics..

Prof. Linguistics: But not even mathematicians seriously deny that maths is a language...

Conference Organiser: Wait... Did something just happen there? It felt kind of 'deja vu', like Groundhog Day, like we were about to start all over again! Is there a way out of this? Are we asking the right questions? Is it really about which subject, which discipline is most important? Can we even say which discipline is really 'foundational'? Or is there another way to approach this...

Do you think it might be possible to rise above this in some way? Could we try to take a perspective which somehow includes all these disciplinary positions as valuable, which doesn't, from the outset, prioritise one over the other? Can we, perhaps, rather than think about which subject, which discipline, we should champion, think about what the problem is, and then think about how best we can tackle it? This might involve combining methods, ideas, knowledge from two or more disciplines.

And here's another idea, something I'd like to call 'academic empathy'? Does this mean anything to you? I mean the idea that even if you are a scientist on the one hand or a humanist on the other, you are able somehow to take on the mindset, the way of thinking, inhabit the way of being, of your colleagues with different interests, different priorities, different mindsets. Do

you think there might be value in this?

You could think of academic empathy as just another, more intellectual, form of the usual empathy which is now widely discussed as a valuable human trait. In any area of research or industry, if you can't work within a team of people with different priorities, agendas, assumptions and beliefs you won't get listened to and your work will be side-lined. In a sense you will be left in possession of useless knowledge—'useless' since no-one will know about it, no-one will use it. Empathy can help you build bridges and take new perspectives—things of immense value in many parts of today's world.

So maybe there's value in being able to understand that all these disciplines are important; but we should stop short of saying that any one discipline is more important, or more 'foundational' than any other. This approach has value for two reasons. On the one hand we can then focus on the problems that need to be addressed and think about the best way to address them, and it also means that we are likely to be able to communicate better with many of our colleagues when working together.

Well, that's my take, anyway! But it's certainly been an interesting evening. Look forward to seeing you at the conference tomorrow – and to changing the world for the better!

[The ending and leaving instructions are left at the discretion of the players, depending on the venue, time allocated etc.]

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Collaboration

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into the review with an idea of what we wanted/needed to learn. Looking through the formal review agenda, we decided which questions to ask of which participants: administrators, faculty, students, or staff. This was an important step, because it helped us have a sense of what we hoped to gain from each of our scheduled meetings. It also enabled us to be more actively engaged in conversations – something that many of the participants told us they appreciated.

Once we arrived on campus, we more or less followed the schedule presented to us. During the course of the day we met with the interim dean, the provost, the admissions office, most of the faculty, a group of current students and recent graduates, as well as twice with the program coordinator. After all of the primary interviews had been completed, the two of us requested a room and a short time to discuss the day's events before holding a final debriefing with the coordinator. This enabled us to consider whether or not our initial impressions had proven accurate, what sorts of unexpected revelations had come to light, and how we wished to present our preliminary findings to the coordinator. Interestingly, we both found this conversation to be personally enlightening. It gave us the opportunity to discuss where, when, and how we had experienced similar issues within our own IDS programs. For example, the admissions representatives had told us of the challenges they faced in attempting to market the interdisciplinary program to prospective students. As we discussed their comments, we found that we had both dealt with some of these same issues at our own institutions. We pondered whether or not it would be beneficial to develop some general training or strategy materials that IDS program coordinators/directors could share with their admissions depart-

ments to assist them in better marketing the local IDS program.

After returning home and taking time to let the many conversations of the review day sink in, we held a Skype video conference to divide up our writing duties. We based these assignments on our perceived individual interests / strengths. If one or the other of us had gleaned more from a particular conversation, we volunteered to write about it. We agreed to use Google Docs as the platform for creating our mutual draft. We were able to post our reflections as we finished them and to comment on each other's writing immediately. We believe that our collaborative final report was ultimately more persuasive and useful than two individual reports would have been.

So, having completed a collaborative review, what are some of the challenges and benefits that we discovered in the process? There are, of course, a number of each. However, we believe that the benefits outweigh the challenges. While collaborators might encounter differences in opinion/perspective during the course of the review, they can also choose to play to their own individual strengths and divide the duties of writing the report accordingly. Another significant benefit for collaborative reviewers is that they gain two new perspectives to use in evaluating their own programs (reviewed and collaborator's programs). Institutions or campus administrators might worry that collaborative reviews of IDS programs will be more expensive, but many institutions already retain two reviewers, and those that don't can control costs by choosing one reviewer who is more local to the campus. In any case, we are suggesting that choosing two reviewers who are both familiar with IDS methodologies and programming can actually increase the overall value of the review process and final report.

We believe that a collaborative approach to program assessment is in line with the foundational principles

of IDS, and has the potential to improve the qualities of our feedback while allowing us to work together to think about our own programs in critical and insightful new ways. Collaborative reviews can be a win-win for all involved. Why? Because building collegial working relationships across institutions is good for IDS generally, AIS specifically, and higher education as a whole. It brings the assessment of IDS programs more in line with the ethos of IDS (enabling us to practice what we preach) and adds credibility to the IDS enterprise and to the objectives of AIS. We hope others will explore collaborative review, and help us develop a process that could become a new model for our field.

Addendum: Perspective of the Institution Under Review

*By Daryl Lee, Coordinator
Interdisciplinary Studies Program
SUNY Polytechnic Institute*

Since this was our first program review for the IDS program at SUNY Polytechnic Institute, the program did not have well-established practices that we were expected to follow. Thus the idea of having our two external reviewers work together was appealing. At our smaller institution, we often find ourselves collaborating with others within and outside of the IDS program. This is not only out of necessity (i.e. limited faculty and resources) but because we've learned that collaboration carries both anticipated and unanticipated benefits: by working together, we're forced to confront our own assumptions, we learn about each other's perspectives and strengths, and we develop new competencies as we tackle projects that are increasingly complex due to our collaboration.

Given these experiences, when Robin DeRosa and Tim Stoller proposed conducting their review collaboratively, it struck me as a promising

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Workshop

**Flattering the Demos:
The Politics and Fictions of Democratic Citizens**

Department of Political Science • Concordia University

NEW DATE: Friday, March 3, 2017

This one-day workshop seeks to stimulate interdisciplinary dialogue on the broad topic of democratic political thought found in literary sources, including novels, poetry, graphic novels, theater, and film. Although we often think of political discourse as rational, literary sources are crucial to democratic politics as they can offer a civic education or way for citizens to think about and understand politics and political debates. Such literary sources are also essential to democratic discourse because they provide a way to engage in politics through critique and protest.

Targeting experts from political science, English, comparative literature, classics, history, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and the liberal arts, this workshop will identify crosscutting research areas which explore the important contribution of alternative epistemological approaches to understanding, promoting, and critiquing democratic practices. Within this theme, the one-day event will investigate the state of research on literary approaches to democratic political thought and identify key areas for future research. The long-term goal will result in an edited volume on the topic.

Faculty and PhD students should submit short abstracts of approximately 250 words. Deadline for proposal submissions: OCTOBER 10, 2016.

For more information or to submit abstracts, please contact Eli Friedland: e_fri@live.concordia.ca.

Collaboration

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approach for maximizing the value of their input. The IDS faculty had invited them to serve as our reviewers because each brought a perspective and background in interdisciplinary studies that we believed could be particularly valuable for our self-study. Having them work collaboratively seemed a good way to put their perspectives into dialogue with each other. Ultimately, we hoped that having the reviewers produce a single, co-authored report that could reflect their individual perspectives while synthesizing these into a consensus would be more helpful in guiding our subsequent discussions both within the program and between the program and the administration.

Indeed, our initial discussions of their report, while still ongoing, have been very fruitful. Moreover, the collaborative review had benefits that we didn't anticipate. Among the most significant was the focus and depth of discussions that it encouraged during the site visit. The fact that Robin and Tim came into the review having identified a common set of key issues and questions allowed them to explore these topics with various stakeholders with a level of depth and understanding that likely would not have been possible had it been necessary to identify these issues during the campus visit. Indeed, the feedback I have received on their visit has been universally positive and I am convinced that this collaborative experiment, combined with each reviewer's preparation and thoughtfulness, was a key contribution to the success of their visit.

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INTEGRATIVE PATHWAYS

Interdisciplinary Doctorate at Binghamton

The interdisciplinary PhD Program in Community and Public Affairs at Binghamton University invites applicants for Fall 2017 admission.

The University says the program prepares students for careers as public scholars focused on addressing critical social and community issues (e.g., educational inequality, racism, gender-based violence).

The curriculum draws from varied disciplines to research “the dynamic interplay among individuals, the organizations serving

them, as well as the communities and societies in which they are embedded.

“Students entering our program typically have several years of practice experience in a variety of fields (e.g., education, counseling, human services, public administration, social work, and student affairs administration) as well as a commitment to social justice, human rights, public service, social welfare, and/or community transformation.”

Applications are due December 1.

About AIS

The Association for Interdisciplinary Studies is the U.S.-based international professional association devoted to interdisciplinary teaching (including service learning), research, program administration, and public policy. Interdisciplinarity integrates the insights of knowledge domains to produce a more comprehensive understanding of complex problems, issues, or questions. AIS serves as an organized professional voice and source of information on interdisciplinary approaches and the integration of insights from diverse communities to address complex problems in education and research. Founded in 1979, it is incorporated as a non-profit 501(c)3 educational association in the state of Ohio.

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