There’s the Wild West and then there’s the West before it was spun, the West as it has been created, imagined, transformed, revered and destroyed. That’s the West that occupies the historians who in 2002 established the Center for the Study of the North American West.
The Evolution of Human Biology

T
he west corridor of the Main Quad was jammed with presentation easels early one Spring Quarter morning as sophomore human biology majors mingled with teachers and colleagues. They were there to present the results of their final assignment, which was to read a scholarly article, illustrate its methodology and findings on posters, and then suggest ways to advance the work. One student looked at the correlation between violent video games and childhood aggressiveness, another looked at Transcendental Meditation and stress and intelligence levels, someone else studied autistic children's capacity for following gazes, and a future medical researcher reported on a study of breast-feeding vs. formula use among HIV-positive women in Uganda.

Professors, course assistants and friends moved from easel to easel to ask questions, congratulate the proud students on their presentations and critiques and, at least in one case, tell them to lose the gum. Though some may have grumbled at first that it felt like a high school science fair, psychologist Anne Fernald said that's exactly how scientists share their work, so they'll have to get used to it.

Without fail, professors in the Program in Human Biology proclaim they've got the best students around, and so it's likely this won't be their last science fair.

For more than 30 years, the program has been turning out gifted students for whom biological, behavioral and social sciences are inseparable. Human biology students in 2004-05 studied bioethics, death, cell development, vaccines, health care politics, the death penalty, race, sports medicine, organ transplantation and donation, vertebrate biology and linguistics, to name just a few. They'll become doctors, lawyers, teachers, researchers and policymakers. And they probably could not have received similar training anywhere else. Harvard and Cornell to some degree modeled their programs after Stanford's, and Indiana University recently invited biologist Craig Heller to give a lecture in anticipation of a new venture there.

But the sheer interdisciplinary scope of Stanford's program, not to mention its longevity and spirit, is utterly exceptional.

It was founded in the late 1960s, when social unrest and student demands led to the establishment of new programs and departments in universities across the country. Most were interdisciplinary: area studies, ethnic studies, women's studies, environmental studies. It was a frightening time, as scientists perfected the weapons of war and the dangers of industrial pollution were first being decried. At Stanford, there were faculty members and students who believed that physicians, scientists, humanists and social scientists needed to work together in this brave new world. Human biology was jump-started by a teach-in in 1968, the same year Paul Ehrlich, one of the program's founders, wrote Population Bomb. It was started by a teach-in in 1968, the same year Paul Ehrlich, one of the program's founders, wrote Population Bomb. It was declared an undergraduate interdepartmental program by the Faculty Senate in 1969, and the Ford Foundation started it off with a five-year grant of nearly $2 million.

"People then disagreed with the paths the government was taking, and somehow this was a way to respond," said one-time program director Heller, who went on to suggest that things aren't that different these days. "In a way, the program was an alternative to violence." Its popularity overwhelmed the founders, who quickly fashioned it into a rigorous course of study starting off with two parallel core sequences emphasizing either the natural or the social sciences. With just four endowed half-chairs, professors were recruited from departments across the campus to participate, and course assistants were recruited from among the seniors. Instructors all were evaluated by students and, in a practice continued today, at least four faculty members read each evaluation. The excitement was such that undergraduates could make them less adventurous or creative. But they learn from each other and find role models among the more advanced students, who inevitably have loosened up, he says.

By 1973 there were 320 majors, making it Stanford's third-largest major, and president Richard Lyman backed a new infusion of funding. That same year, biologist Donald Kennedy took over as program director. Kennedy eventually became provost and university president and today is the Bing Professor of Environmental Science and a senior fellow in the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies.

Human biology in the mid-1980s was the second-largest major on campus after economics (rankings the two majors is hard to pin down, he says) and inevitably the demand, having neither sufficient funding nor enough faculty. Heller took it upon himself in those years to develop new resources and expand the fieldwork and honors programs. But inadequate funding and an absence of teaching positions is still a problem.

The second-largest major at Stanford has no faculty billets. Dollar for dollar to the university, there's no better deal, the program's biologists, physicians, psychologists and anthropologists point out.

The director from 1992 to 1995 was Bill Durham, to date the only professor actually hired (half time) by the program. He also is a member of the Department of Anthropological Sciences. On his watch, core courses were beefed up, course assistants' salaries were increased and new classes were developed to address sexuality, health, pollution, genetics and public policy. Field programs sent students to the Galápagos Islands and to Africa, to legal clinics, to inner-city neighborhoods and to elementary schools. Durham was followed by neuroscientist Russell Fernald. The current director is Jeffrey Wine, a former postdoc of Kennedy's, a member of the Psychology Department and a cystic fibrosis researcher.

Students today tend to arrive at Stanford more career-oriented than when the program started, Heller notes, which could make them less adventurous or creative. But they learn from each other and find role models among the more advanced students, who inevitably have loosened up, he says. Six junior and senior student advisers hold regular office hours; course assistants are still seniors. There is a student newsletter. Students and professors alike proclaim the camaraderie among the majors, and it was as visible in the Quad that spring morning as the brightly colored posters.

To celebrate its accomplishments, the program published a booklet in 2001 called "The First 30 Years" that includes tributes and some remarkable stories.

"At Stanford we sometimes take for granted all that human biology does," wrote 1998 graduate Laura Chyu, who now works with people from other schools has shown me how unique the program is."
The novel is the literary form that bespeaks modernity. One begat the other, which is a way of saying that the study of the novel is the study of our modern world. That nexus defines Stanford’s Center for the Study of the Novel.

“I’m interested in realism,” says Margaret Cohen, the center’s director. Realism, she points out, is the genre most associated with the 19th-century novel, the literary creation whose culture, language, setting and ethos are inseparable from modern times and nations. The world of cities and nations emerges through realism.

Cohen spent the 2004-05 academic year as a fellow at the Stanford Humanities Center working on her latest exploration of the conjoined realms of literature and modernity. “The Romance of the Sea” is the working title for her newest project, a study of literature, waterways, ocean travel and the maritime.

Like her predecessor, Center for the Study of the Novel founder Franco Moretti, Cohen, a professor in the Department of French and Italian, is deeply committed to the idea that the novel is grounded in material life. The maritime, she explained in her introductory comments at an April conference devoted to “The Maritime in Modernity,” plays a role in many interdisciplinary paradigms: flows, circulation and exchange are at the heart of economic, cultural and social intercourse, and thus at the heart of modern literature.

“Strange as it seems, no other university in the world has a center for the study of the novel like ours,” says Moretti, the Danily C. and Laura Louise Bell Professor and a professor of English. “At times the simplest things are the most complicated to imagine. There’s no other place in the world that has a similar flow of international and national specialists on the novel. By and large, all the people who do great work, they’ve all been here.”

The center was established by Moretti when he arrived at Stanford in 2000. Each year it holds two conferences, the Ian Watt Lecture on the History of the Novel (whose creator is national specialists on the novel. It is a place, above all, where Stanford graduate students can get exposure to a wide range of scholars and establish bonds with their fellows at nearby universities.

The topics of the upcoming conferences make it clear that Cohen, who says she’s interested in “the edges of the novel,” is very serious about understanding the form in a wide context while not neglecting what she calls “the specificity of literary studies within the humanities.” The core and the periphery of the discipline, in other words, are not mutually exclusive, but sometimes the core gets neglected amid enthusiasm for exploring the outlying areas.

In November, the conference on “Adventure” will draw scholars housed in literature, film and art departments. One of the heavy hitters visiting this year will be Pascale Casanova, who drew international praise (and controversy) for The World Republic of Letters, first published in France in 1999. Like Cohen and Moretti, Casanova overlay[s] literature and maps as a way of understanding inseparable cultural and power relations. “Nothing like this has been attempted before,” philosopher and critic Perry Anderson wrote in the London Review of Books, noting “the geographical range of Casanova’s materials, from Madagascar to Romania, Brazil to Switzerland, Croatia to Algeria.” (Anderson will be one of the commentators at the February Book Conversation featuring Casanova.)

Using the world-systems theory developed by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (upon which Moretti also bases his most recent work), Casanova essentially looks at literature as a problem of globalization, in the current sense of the word. Inequality, capital accumulation and struggle between core and periphery are all invoked to explain and analyze literary production, which exists in a constant tension between universalization and fragmentation. In the words of a critic in The Nation, “She has created a map of global literary power relations where none had existed.”

Like Casanova and Cohen, Moretti has a global perspective, which, almost by definition, is interdisciplinary. To the economic relations of world-systems theory he adds the theory of evolution, the idea being that all the multiplicity of literary forms are the result of historical divergence among different trunks. Geography, too, plays an important role in his analysis; he maps novels to allow patterns and ideas to emerge that otherwise would remain hidden.

Though Moretti and Cohen may gaze over the horizon, they are both cognizant that the center is, as Moretti put it, an institution and “not a book that Margaret and I are writing together.” It is a place, above all, where Stanford graduate students and faculty can get exposure to a wide range of scholars and establish bonds with their fellows in nearby universities.

Schuyler and her colleagues have picked Bill Brown to be the next Ian Watt Lecturer. (Watt was an early leader of both the Stanford Humanities Center and the Modern Thought and Literature Program.) Brown (Stanford Ph.D. ’89) is a professor of English at the University of Chicago and a member of its Committee on the History of Culture. He has described his research as taking place at the intersection of literary, visual and material cultures; he has written about, among other things, baseball, dime Westerns and consumption.

Add all that in with world-systems theory and the maritime, and you’ve got some very, very interdisciplinary things going on.

“We’ve made this center, which nobody else has, with a director with no salary and two graduate students and some staff assistance from the English Department,” Moretti says. “We have been an inspiration to many universities. We have received so many e-mails over the years from around the world from people wanting to come here to work, not realizing that the center is a small room with no windows.”

But what a view.
THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF TEAM-TEACHING

At the Philosophy Department, formerly chaired by Provost John Etchemendy, instructors receive full credit for one team-taught class per year. That allows Laurer Anderson, a specialist in Nietzsche and late-modern philosophy, to work with Josh Landy of the Department of French and Italian, whose most recent work is titled Philosophy as Fiction: Self, Deception and Knowledge in Proust. The pair appear to be two of the university’s biggest fans of team-teaching, and they have certainly worked the concept to admirable limits. Their class, Philosophy and Literature Gateway, is a required course for the new Philosophical and Literary Thought track. The track itself is their invention, the result of several years of friendship and collaboration in reading groups and in a workshop sponsored by the Humanities Center.

As their counterparts across campus, they said learning to think in someone else’s terms was that what they had realized this is a great learning experience for me,” recalled Andrea Nightingale of the Classics (ICLS) course with environmental historian Richard White last year, and the duo is repeating the class, Representing Nature: The Boundaries of the Human, this quarter.

“I’m learning environmental history. He’s learning about philosophy,” Nightingale said. “I’m sounding more like a historian and he’s sounding like a philosopher. He’s talking about Descartes, and I’m saying, ‘Wait a minute, that’s supposed to be me!’”

David Holloway, professor of history and political science and former director of the Stanford Institute for International Studies, said one of the many people with whom he has taught Peace Studies was American historian Bert Bernstein. “We used to joke that we had a lot of common interests, but we only talked about administration,” Holloway said. “Teaching together allowed us to talk about the substance of our interests. Team-teaching allows you to actually be present with a colleague. It’s intellectually interesting. It’s fun.”

While almost all faculty involved in team-teaching say the experience was a good one, most also agree that the institutional culture common to most universities can present obstacles.

“This is an area where Stanford could be doing a better job,” said Stefanos Zenios, a health care expert at the Graduate School of Business who in spring 2005 taught a three-way class cross-listed in the Humanities and Sciences.

Zenios did cross the street—in fact, he was accustomed to it. Zenios was a specialist in Nietzsche and late-modern philosophy, and he crossed the campus. But despite the seven schools, the physical impediments to collaboration can rival the administrative ones. Many describe their intellectual collaboration as being set up a great collaboration, but it felt like it was more difficult with people on other university campuses.

For me, Stanford’s Medical School is the same as UCSF or the University of Chicago. I managed to set up a great collaboration, but it felt like it was more difficult with people across the street than across the world.”

Zenios did cross the street—in fact, he crossed the campus. But despite the unique physical proximity of Stanford’s seven schools, the physical impediments to collaboration can rival the administrative ones. Many describe their intellectual cross-pollination as the result of serendipity. They met at a conference. They both jogged. They had a common friend, or a common student. Or perhaps, if the Clark Center’s strategy bears fruit, they met at one of those long lunch tables in the cafeteria.

Overcoming the obstacles to team-teaching is an exercise well worth the effort, many professors say.

There may be an issue that faculty disagree on, and that’s a wonderful thing, because students see two intellectuals at work addressing a problem to which the answer is uncertain, and that’s utterly healthy,” said Elliot Eisner, the Lee L. Jacks Professor of Education, an authority on arts education. “If the university is interested in team-teaching, it ought to make it clear that it has to be encouraged, not penalized, and that people who engage in team-taught courses should not have to compensate their department or school with additional work on the basis that they’re teaching with someone else.”

Eisner himself was compensated for his groundbreaking Education 200, The Work of Art and the Creation of Mind, but the host of arts faculty members who worked with him did not receive teaching credit. Holloway said he could team-teach only because he had a lighter load as director of the Institute for International Studies. Otherwise, he said, it would have been difficult.

“I think there ought to be more flexibility than there is,” he said.

One administrative hurdle frequently remarked upon by instructors was that they don’t get full credit for a team-taught course.

The rules vary from department to department and from school to school. Depending upon one’s discipline, one gets full credit, half credit, or no credit at all. School of Education instructors receive full credit for teaching together if they both attend all sessions, or if it is the first time the course is taught, or if the course has at least 20 students enrolled.

At Humanities and Sciences, decisions on teaching credit are made by individual departments.

In the School of Engineering, teaching load decisions also are handled by the individual departments and, at least according to Dean Jim Plummer, team-teaching requests are generally resolved amicably. The jointly appointed members of the faculty, of whom there are quite a few, work out their teaching loads with their two home departments, but that too generally runs smoothly, he said.

School of Earth Sciences Dean Pamela Matson said instructors there receive full credit for team-teaching.

Is teaching a class with a colleague from another department half the work? Not according to School of Earth Sciences Dean Pam Matson, whose instructors also receive full credit for team-teaching. In fact, she said, teaching together can be so much work that some professors find themselves unable to find the time. Matson herself has often team-taught, most recently a freshman seminar with Suki Hoagland, executive director of the Interdisciplinary Program and Resources (IPER), called A Transition to Sustainability: Development and Environment in the 21st Century.

Nor does particle physicist Patricia Burchat, winner of a 2005 Guggenheim Fellowship, think a team-taught class is an easy ticket. Burchat began meeting with colleagues from biology and engineering a full year before their course, Math and Engineer- ing Core had its first session. Together they developed a pedagogy that worked for all four of them, and throughout the course they continued meeting every week with a diverse group of teaching assistants.

Giving faculty half-credit for a team-taught course is “not a good way to travel,” Eisner said, “because in fact there’s more work involved, not less.” Referring to Education 200, he noted that this was not a case in which a guest lecturer made a cameo appearance and then walked off stage. Just about every instructor—representing drama, music, visual arts and education—was present at just about every session, he said. “For most instructors, this was an additional responsibility for which they got no compensation and, perhaps, no adulation either from their colleagues.”

Nightingale also recalled that at first the workload exceeded what she was accustomed to. She and White read each other’s lectures in advance every week and often found themselves altering and rewriting their presentations in reaction to each other’s work.

“The amount of work outside the class is huge,” she said. “There’s a lot of work at home to keep the coherence of the course. Our lectures answered each other; they were a dialogue.”

Such a dialogue often has to overcome mutual unintelligibility. Biologist Dafna Elrad, who co-teaches a course with chemist Richard Zare, the Marguerite Blake Wilbur Professor in Natural Sciences, noted that chemists tend to think more quantitatively than biologists, who are more interpretive. Burchat, the physicist, recalled that she and her colleagues would often...
accretionary with a statistician and an engineer, noted there are engineers “who have never seen rocks” and geologists who don’t know how to develop computational models. They not only have to learn how their colleagues do things; they have to learn how they think and speak. Composer Mark Applebaum, who has co-taught with a philosopher and also participated in Education 200, remarked of team-teaching, “All the teachers became students of their colleagues.”

Maybe that doesn’t sound like work. Some departments, said Zare, who is the winner of the 2001 Wolf Prize in chemistry, can be “very parochial” and regard classes such as the one he co-taught with Elrad more or less as a hobby. He can afford a hobby, he conceded; junior faculty usually cannot.

Some people think that “if it’s not in the department, it can’t be serious,” he noted during a brief break in his and Elrad’s freshman lab last spring. “Departments have names. Scientific problems don’t have names on them.”

That line of thinking, adjusted for the discipline, was the inspiration for all the team-teaching classes whose instructors were consulted for this article. “There are good institutional reasons for disciplinary boundaries, but creativity takes place at the interfaces,” Applebaum said, referencing Education 200. “I leaped at the opportunity” to work with Eisner.

Nightingale also recalled the thrill of working with someone outside his discipline. When he took a class in White last spring, in this White, the Margaret Byrne Professor of American History and a MacArthur Foundation fellow who is considered one of the world’s leading environmental historians. Her research of late had veered away from Plato and Aristotle to examine the philosophy of ecology. White heard about her work and invited her to join him in teaching IHUM 53, Thinking with Nature.

What does an expert on the American West have to say to a classicist who loves Walden? Endless amounts, it turned out. “There were times when we disagreed with each other, and of course that’s the purpose of IHUM, understanding that there’s a scholarly debate with radically differing perspectives. But this didn’t create friction; it created pleasure.”

Applebaum, who has been associate dean for aca-
dermic affairs at the School of Earth Sciences since 1999, has team-taught several courses. His cur-
test offering, which has existed for nine years, is a “poster child for interdisciplinary team-teaching,” he said proudly, a poster child “born of necessity.” It is a graduate survey course with no prerequi-
sites, he said, unlikely to last for long.

When Durham last winter met Barnett when they were fellows at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. They were running partners, they exchanged information and later ended up organizing a conference on eco-tourism at the Business School. The dean took an interest, sat Durham down for lunch and said, “You know, this would be an awfully good thing to have a class on. Ever thought about teaching it?” Durham said he had no business doing that. “I thought, well, the defunct Science, Math and Engineering Core, an experiment aimed at making non-science students sci-
cence-literate. Enrollments were low and the program was discontinued.

Education 200 also has disappeared. Eisner attrib-
utes its demise to the extra burden it represented for faculty. “It’s still on the books, but it’s not taught. I’m retiring after [this] year, and I’m not sure anybody has the appetite to take it on,” he said.

But, despite individual set-
backs, collaborative teach-
ing appears to be slowly on the rise. Durham last winter quarter launched a new team-
taught course on Environmental Change and Emerging Infectious Disease. The senior scholar said he and his junior colleague Jamie Jones had been talking and real-
tized they had complementary interests.

“From demographics and population biology, and I come from conservation and ecology,” Durham said. “Jamie’s brand-new and I’ve been teaching a bunch of it. It’s a bit odd, I’d say. ‘Why don’t we teach together?’ Why not put our interests together? It bubbled up from that conversation. Neither of us knew enough to put it all together, but we got this subject on our own. It seemed a great way to share the benefits of years of experience with a brand-new teacher. And it has worked smash-
hitly.”
The people at the Stanford Humanities Center apparently didn’t get the memo about humanities working alone amidst dusty books, devoting years of their lives to writing tomes on one reads. But then again, few humanists have gotten that memo, though belief in its existence persists. The problem-solving crowd and some humanists themselves may have prescribed a definitional overhaul for the field, but at least on this campus, the excitement is palpable and the boundaries eminently flexible. The humanities—ask anyone—are fun.

They’re also profoundly interdisciplinary. Back in 1999, historian Keith Baker—at the time director of the Humanities Center and later the associate dean for humanities—organized a broad-ranging series of conferences devoted to “The Shape of the Humanities.” It was clear that much of the work in the humanities defied disciplinary description, though it’s also true that the disciplines themselves were beginning to defy description. So the all-star lineup of scholars and critics participating in the conferences debated the meaning of such terms as “history,” “literature,” “culture” and “interdisciplinarity” (http://esch.dartmouth.edu/icsh/1998-1999events/index.html).

The very fact that there was such a meeting, however, points to a kind of uncertainty, whose origin may lie elsewhere than in the humanities themselves. When Ralph Hexter, dean of the College of Letters and Science and dean of arts and humanities at the University of California-Berkeley, announced last year that he was leaving to become president of Hampshire College, he made it clear that though the positive reasons for taking such a job were obvious, he was also concerned about the humanities’ increasingly marginal place at large research universities such as Cal (http://insidehighered.com/careers/2005/04/18/hexter). The workshops point out where the crust is thin.”

But the workshops are where the heavy lifting takes place, the site where definitions and concepts get tested, where cross-disciplinary friendships are forged, where fellows, faculty, graduate students and visitors teach each other how to think in interdisciplinary ways.

“The point of the workshops is to bring people together,” says Wahl. “With the right incentives and the means and the time, the kind of scholarship that workshops can develop is quite phenomenal. We’re giving people tools.”

The range of subject matter covered by the workshops is indicative of the reconfiguration of the humanities in recent years, what anthropologist Clifford Geertz—who is a frequent point of reference for historians and literary critics—called “blurred genres.” The topics are, quite literally, all over the map. They embrace history, policy, creativity, language, science and identity. They also come and go, reflecting, Baker says, the ebb and flow of intellectual trends, people and energy. Wahl says, for instance, that she was trying to line up a workshop in a couple of years taking art history as its starting point; a particular fellow slated to be at the center, matched with a particular faculty member, with maybe the right number of ripe graduate students thrown in, might just result in the right mix for a successful few years of intellectual exploration. As opportunities appear and disappear, a particular workshop may continue, but the content shifts slightly each time.

For the past decade, the workshops have been funded by two five-year grants from the Mellon Foundation. For example, there are two Humanities and International Studies Fellows at the Humanities Center this year, the result of collaboration between Bender, a professor in the English Department, and Cost Blacker, director of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, the axis of the international initiative launched in May by President John Hennessy. Bender has pointed to the wealth of scholarship in the humanities and in and about foreign languages as another obvious point of collaboration, particularly given the frequent lamentations that few U.S. government officials speak anything other than English. The Stanford Institute for the Environment, the anchor of the multidisciplinary environmental initiative, and the Humanities Center are planning a conference on humanities and the environment for 2006. Links with the incipient arts initiative, which will concentrate on creativity, are even easier to devise. As Bender points out frequently, the humanities are “key to the multidisciplinary campaign.” It’s not just a matter of the humanities folks crossing the street; there are plenty of reasons why the rest of the university should make its way to the center on Santa Teresa Street.

The Humanities Center has three basic missions: fellowships, public events and interdisciplinary workshops. All three reflect the elastic nature of the humanities, the excitement of working in areas whose boundaries are up for grabs. Fellowships are both internal and external (http://esch.dartmouth.edu/fellowships/index.html). Public events include conferences, the university’s Presidential Lectures series and endowed lectures, many of which are available on audio and video streams. Most of the public lectures are aimed at a broad, interdisciplinary audience: “The purpose is to show the public what scholarship produces,” says the center’s outgoing executive director, Elizabeth Wahl.

The Humanities Center has obtained a one-time 1:1 Mellon matching grant of $1 million and a $600,000 National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant with a 4:1 match (http://www.multi.stanford.edu).
The text mixes text readings with presentations. While in some ways conservative, forces participants to intense intellectual interaction. This is not due solely to the text, we make this explosion possible. I have to all come together around this text. By all referring to and doctors and software designers and philosophers to some people but not to others, and we all have to use the language of the text. So people from human biology to human biology and investigated the impact on black/white relations in a Southern town as she held down a day job in Silicon Valley. It’s crazy, but very productive. Yet our approach is very conservative. It’s not for weaklings, he warns: “It’s like protection for your brain.”

One of those youngsters is Kenny Gundle, a senior in human biology whom Gumbrecht met at Stanford’s center in Kyoto, Japan. “We fell in love, intellectually,” he says. “How Do Identities Matter?” led by Paula Moya, she interpret the terms used by the locals to refer to the nature of the area, her methodology and her sources. With whom should she speak? How much should sociologist, decided on the spot to turn the session into a book group: “I know—we’ll read the Mary Waters book!” Moya said, referring to a recent study in New York City of West Indians in New York City. Like the PRG, the Identities workshop started off as something else. Moya is a member of the Future of Minority Studies National Research Project, which itself grew out of discussions among friends at several Midwestern and New York universities about identity and pedagogy. Conversations led to conferences, which led to more conferences, which led Moya to think she wanted to create something at Stanford “that would be an interdisciplinary space for people to get together to talk about how identities matter.” At the same time, it would book Stanford into this debate on a national level. The obviously gifted teacher got her obviously effective, interdisciplinary students. There is one graduate student coordinator stipend of $1,800 a year per workshop, and the effort was launched in fall 2003. Presen- tations at the discussions included “Disabled as Masquerade” (by Tobin Siebers of the University of Michigan), a presentation on “Mark Twain’s Lynching Narratives” by Lisa Arrillaga (a graduate student in modern thought and literature) and a talk by Ramon Saldivar, Moya’s colleague in the English Department, who has been called “a lifeline.”

PRG is completely open,” Gumbrecht said recently. “We have to talk about how identities matter.” At the same time, Gumbrecht, the Albert Wasserman postdoc and physicist who turned into an interdisciplinarian, seems genuinely exhilarated at the intellectual challenge of the group. He was one of the speakers at the workshop called “Between Texas and Japan: Idioms of Race, Nation and Identity.” Moya, whose “postpositivist realist” work on racial and gender identity has won national attention, was intent upon making the workshop a place where the humanities meet the social sciences. And indeed there are the distinctions that the participants make are: for example, there was the time the literary critics matter- of-factly talked about something called “the political economy of poetic form” and the sociologists who were headed for the door. The critics, in turn, were stunned to learn about the nitty-gritty of data collection. “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” McDermott says. “Your most basic methodological assumptions are called into question.”

McDermott gave a presentation to the workshop in May on her field research, which was set to begin this fall. She planned to lead a basically undercover existence. “I had been asked to do something for a speaker at a conference on public opinion surveys, she notes that her approach to research has been altered as a result of two years of listening to literary critics. “I pay closer attention to symbols and particular interpretations I give to social interactions and political knowledge,” she says. “It has made me a better field researcher.”

The text becomes the medium for different interpretations,” he says. “The text takes care of ensuring that it is interdisciplinary. Jonas, for example, was brand-new to everyone in different ways. Some concepts are new to sociologists, others to historians, and we all have to use the language of the text. So people from human biology and doctors and software designers and philosophers all come together around this text. By referring to the text, we make this explosion possible. I have to talk about how identities matter.”

The Silicon Valley guy is Niklas Damias, a one-time Stanford postdoc and physician who turned into an interdisciplinary researcher. “The real reason for the multidisciplinary character of the group has to do with its history and sedimenta- tion,” he says. “The workshop began in 1989, a year after a meeting organized by a group of interested people. And they are interested in the group’s members, we have begun to meet more regularly in order to discuss interdisciplinary ideas, but they have all agreed to the group’s members’ efforts to keep the group’s members’ efforts to keep

And, he added, he and his partner, also a scientist, take principle in thinking that their presence may have inspired humanities to tackle more scientific texts. Thus the PRG model of concentrating on a text, while in some ways conservative, forces participants to be more interdisciplinary. “How Do Identities Matter?” led by Paula Moya, director of the undergraduate program at the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, also mixes text readings with presentations. In fact, when a speaker had to cancel in May, Moya and her workshop colleague Monica McDermott,
In three of its four interdisciplin ary initiatives (devoted to the environment, human health and development issues), Stan ford is addressing fundamental world problems with an intellectual framework and normalcy associated with think tanks or national laboratories. It is suggested that significant groups of faculty covering a broad range of disciplines will work together on these initiatives with the common objective of collaborative modes of investigation differ significantly from normal academic endeavors, which usually involve one or a few faculty and several graduate students. It is important to ask, therefore, what Stanford brings to the table compared to think tanks and national laboratories.

First and foremost, Stanford has an array of major intellectual capabilities in its Graduate School of Business and the schools of earth sciences, education, engineering, humanities and science, law and medicine that are unmatched by any think tank or national laboratory in the world. In no other place are these capabilities linked so closely, both geographically and intellectually.

Cost Blacker made this point clearly in the May 4, 2005 issue of Stanford Report, stating: “We know that something is terribly wrong with the system because 90 percent of sub-Saharan Africa is in a developmental tailspin. Here, the piece is how to build effective, efficient institutions. This unites political scientists, sociologists and people from the Business School, the Law School and Engineering. Business, systems approach—try to understand the conditions under which institutions work. We know good institutions when we see them, but we don’t know how to create them.”

Most think tanks tend to be strong in the policy, economic and legal aspects of the problems they address. Think tanks are not geared for long-range, large-scale, multi-disciplinary research. Even if they are, they lack the human and financial resources needed to push forward. “We’re trying to understand the conditions under which institutions work,” says Blacker. “We know good institutions when we see them, but we don’t know how to create them.”

Stanford has them all, and there is an uncommon and well-established tradition of collaboration that transcends subject boundaries. It has, in addition, extremely talented graduate students who can both contribute to and benefit from participation in multidisciplinary teams.

One partial “proof of principle” is the Stanford Synchrotron Radiation Laboratory. SSRIL, garnered the cooperation of faculty from Applied Physics, Chemical Engineering, Chemistry, Electrical Engineering, Geophysical & Environmental Science, Materials Science & Engineering, Medicine, Microbiology & Immunology, Neurology, Structural Biology and the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, as well as outside users. The leadership presented a “grand scheme” for the laboratory’s development, which evolved as new ideas emerged from the leadership and from all users. Implementation of this plan involved splitting the work into components that required the attention of a subset of the participants with specific expertise. A special feature of the organization is the broad array of disciplines associated with the initiatives is likely to be important for their success.

Experience also indicates that there are likely to be times when an initiative needs faculty with specific capabilities for whom there is no welcoming department. Such situations, always a part of any institution’s leadership. Indeed, the Executive Cabinet has discussed this potential problem several times and has reaffirmed its commitment to providing faculty support in departments. We are committed to working with the departments and the initiatives when such circumstances arise. Though we may not have the solution to all problems, we anticipate that we will find general solutions as we gain experience with individual problems.

Finally, SSRIL succeeded because it promised and provided faculty and students with scientific capabilities far beyond what was available in any other campus laboratory. As a consequence, faculty and students have been able to achieve things in other ways and push the frontiers of their individual scientific fields.

The close proximity of scientists from different disciplines for long hours and many days has led to many interdisciplinary endeavors at the SSRIL, and students have been known to accomplish, rather than as individuals. They come to understand their peers’ thesis research. Interactions between outside scientists broaden their perspectives and introduce them to research performed in industry and national laboratories. Students participating in the initiatives are likely to gain related benefits as a result of working with faculty and students from other institutions.

To ensure that these Stanford initiatives are successful, the leadership and participants will have to find that fact, they will have to work together and find common ground. They’ll have to determine what makes sense, and where the strength and resources are needed to face this challenge.

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