Proposal for Common Experience 2009-2010

The Whole Mind: Crossing Boundaries of Disciplines

This 3D magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan of a normal human brain has been produced by the 3T MRI scanner at Neurospin, one of the most advanced MRI research centres in the world. The high magnetic field strength allows detailed examination of the brain and brain disorders. Neurospin was founded in 2006, and is located near Paris, France.
The Whole Mind: Crossing the Boundaries of Disciplines


The Brain — is wider than the Sky —
For — put them side by side —
The one the other will contain
With ease — and You — beside —

--Emily Dickinson

As a theme for the Common Experience, the subject of The Whole Mind is relevant for our university with its tradition of teaching. Historically Texas State is known for its commitment to training teachers in all disciplines and is advancing its status as a research institution. As “the rising star,” Texas State is working to increase its prestige by attracting the best students while meeting the needs of a diverse student population. Many students are deciding to declare double majors (ten per cent in the Mitte Honors Program) and/or double or triple minors because they are not only interested in more than one subject area but are fascinated with the big picture as well as the intersection of disciplines. In addition, the Bachelor of General Studies allows students to design a course of interdisciplinary studies by connecting three minors.

With University Seminar and Mitte Honors courses being naturally interdisciplinary, the theme of The Whole Mind: Crossing Boundaries of Disciplines has a practical as well as a theoretical basis. While focused on engaging first year students in learning and active participation in campus and community life, University Seminar classes are taught by faculty and staff who bring to the classroom their particular perspective from across campus disciplines. As the Mitte Honors Program anticipates moving from a program to a college, the “teaching laboratory” and interdisciplinary nature of honors course offerings not only will remain an important element of the program but should have a deeper influence across campus as departmental honors course offerings increase.

In addition, as the College of Education continues research and innovations in teaching teachers, as the McCoy College of Business continues to prepare business leaders for the 21st century, as the College of Liberal Arts emphasizes problem-solving, communication, cross-cultural understanding and global awareness, and as the College of Science captures students’
imaginations by critically examining the connectivity of the natural world, the theme of The Whole Mind will contribute to the context as the university and broader community consider how we think about thinking and learning in relation to real world outcomes.

Across academia we see evidence of a turn from narrow specializations to broader spectrums of learning approaches that was once the basis of a strong liberal arts education (which included the sciences) with origins in the Renaissance. This turn can be seen as educators, artists, social and physical scientists as well as business experts work together to address critical issues that impact research and society through interdisciplinary perspectives and collaborations, research support of multiple intelligences, and cross-disciplinary understandings of innovation and creativity. With recent neurological data on the brain we are beginning to form an explanation of how we think which is challenging our understanding of who we are as human beings.

Any exploration of The Whole Mind pushes us into the future: what kind of thinking is required to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century? Business leaders such as Richard Branson, Oprah Winfrey, Steve Jobs, and those running Google understand the role of making “connections between diverse and seemingly separate disciplines.” Their understanding of “conceptual blending” contributes to the innovative effectiveness of their business ventures.

As we move from the information age to the conceptual age, our ways of thinking about thinking require us to imagine new perspectives and new worlds, and to strengthen our abilities to put together concepts. The roles of the artist, the designer, the inventor, the caregiver, and the storyteller are slowly being recognized for their crucial contributions in enriching our lives. The power of “branding” through our own “rising star” slogan and logo design has contributed to a new perspective of Texas State. The theme of The Whole Mind can intensify the awareness of how concepts are put together.

Moreover, the theme of The Whole Mind has the potential to open discussion and exploration of different ways of learning. To better understand how dyslexia brings about a strengthening of other gifts, to consider the abilities of the person with characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, and to explore the world of Asperger’s Syndrome and
autism will bring a new awareness of crossing and responding to the boundaries of learning differences especially as more and more of these special students come to Texas State.

The concept of the Whole Mind can be explored in the sciences, the arts, education, in areas that study behavior such as psychology, accounting, finance and management, health, and the humanities. In addition, the way we think is a focus in literature—science fiction and other genres—and history. By engaging all the members of our university, who by their very membership in an institution of higher learning are exploring a robust variety of intellectual pursuits, we have an opportunity to better understanding the ways in which the mind works and to explore ways to unleash its full human potential. Most importantly, we hope to unleash the great minds of Texas State students.

I. The Common Text

Primary Text:
* A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future
  Author: Daniel H. Pink
  Publisher: The Penguin Group; First Riverhead trade paperback edition: March 2006

Daniel Pink’s *A Whole New Mind* explores the shift under way in much of the advanced world where “we are moving from an economy and society built on logical, linear, computer like capabilities to an economy and a society built on . . . inventive, empathetic, big-picture capabilities” (2). He describes abilities people need to master in “the conceptual age” where many jobs no longer exist due to automation and outsourcing, and suggests that we need to break down barriers between subjects so that students learn to make connections between different disciplines. Pink builds a strong case for engaging and paying attention to “the legions of emotionally astute and creatively adroit people whose distinctive abilities the Information Age has often overlooked and undervalued” (2).

Accessible, funny and thought-provoking, *A Whole New Mind* will stimulate professors, students and community members to think about how their own disciplines connect with other disciplines. The following quotations from the book will raise questions about our changing world:
“. . .As the scut work gets off-loaded, engineers and programmers will have to master different aptitudes, relying more on creativity than competence, more on tactic knowledge than technical manuals, and more on fashioning the big picture than sweating the details” (44).

“. . .The future is not some [threatening] world in which individuals are either left-brained or extinct or right-brained and ecstatic. . . . L(left)-Directed Thinking remains indispensable. It’s just no longer sufficient. In the Conceptual Age, what we need instead is a whole new mind” (51).

“Many engineering deadlocks have been broken by people who are not engineers at all. . . .This is because perspective is more important than IQ. The ability to make leaps of thought is a common denominator among originators of breakthrough ideas. Usually this ability resides in people with very wide backgrounds, multidisciplinary minds, and a broad spectrum of experiences” (136).

*A Whole New Mind* will inspire conversations about how we learn, what is thinking, and the role of one’s major. In the process, the university and broader community will consider how we face economic issues, the changes brought about by technology and globalization, as well as how we use the creative process in problem-solving as we face the future.

The committee also suggests other texts relevant to *A Whole New Mind*.

1.) Supplemental texts:

*The Canon*
Author: Natalie Angier
Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Co (2007)

*Framers of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*
Author: Howard Gardner
Publisher: BasicBooks (1993)

The Image, Knowledge of Life in Society
Author: Kenneth Boulding, Economist, person of letters, and peace activist
http://cepa.newschool.edu/het/profiles/boulding.htm

The Moral Mind
Author: Henry Haslam
http://www.moralmind.co.uk/

2.) Examples of The Whole Mind in Practice:

John Bansford—University of Washington
http://www.fossworks.com/research.asp

David Edwards—novelist/theatre
http://people.seas.harvard.edu/~dedwards/

Noam Elkies—a composer and number theorist
http://www.math.harvard.edu/~elkies/

Carl Glickman, Educator

John Paul Lederach, Peace Mediator and author of The Art and Soul of Building Peace
http://acrnet.org/acrlibrary/more.php?id=49_0_1_0_M

Candice Pert—Neurosurgeon, Johns Hopkins http://www.candacepert.com/

Sally Shaywitz, Yale neuroscientist and dyslexia specialist
http://www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/shaywitz.htm

Abe Vergheese-Dr. Abraham Vergheese, MD (Geriatric Medicine, Infectious Disease Medicine, Internal Medicine, and Pulmonary in San Antonio, Texas.) Author of My Own Country, The Tennis Partner, and numerous articles in The New Yorker and scientific journals.
http://www/english.emory.edu/Bahri/Vergheese.html

II. Central Academic Event:

Suggestions for speakers include:
1. Simon Baron-Cohen, author of *The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain*
   (http://www.autismresearchcentre.com/arc/staff_member.asp?id=33)

2. Howard Gardner, author of *Frames of Mind, the Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (http://www.howardgardner.com/)


III. Collaborative Potential

Dr. Ann Marie Ellis, Dean of Liberal Arts, has suggested bringing Howard Gardner to campus as a speaker. A whole series of panels, conferences, and talks on the topic of Multiple Intelligences could involve every aspect of campus and the broader community.

Dr. Denise Smart, Dean of the McCoy College of Business, and Dr. Paula Rechner, Chair of the Department of Management, mentioned Henry Haslam’s book, *The Moral Mind*. The book argues that ethics may be hard-wired into the brain. The McCoy College of Business has indicated interest in contributing ideas in the areas of consumer behavior, economics, information processing, as well as other areas that study behavior (accounting, finance, management, etc.).

Dr. Jon Lasser, Department of EAPS, and Dr. Jo Webber (to be contacted) are interested in bringing Simon Baron-Cohen, author of *The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain* to campus for his
work on autism—an area that would explore the brain and how we learn, appealing to many in our community.

The theme of The Whole Mind holds promise for collaboration with the Music Department (especially in bringing to campus another Juilliard concert), the Art Department, the Sciences and other areas to examine crossing boundaries in disciplines. And finally, the theme of The Whole Mind has potential for involvement of area libraries, schools and educators in exploring collaborations and interdisciplinary teaching and learning.