

cian beliefs about treatments for chronically ill patients still strongly determine how aggressively such patients are treated. Some might argue that we should just let the cowboys be cowboys, without any financial incentives or patient-focused information. We disagree. To paraphrase a famous economist, the lives affected are our own, and the money is ours, too.

GENERAL EDUCATION

I READ WITH INTEREST about the ongoing review of the College's General Education program ("Tough Grading for Gen Ed," September-October, page 32), Melanie Wang's reflections on her own and her peers' experience of Gen Ed ("The Scientists' Daughter," September-October, page 36), and the review committee's Interim Report.

I was surprised, however, to see little discussion of what was most valuable and distinctive in my own experience of general education: learning to recognize connections among different disciplines, and how each discipline might be brought to bear on thoughtful, active engagement with the world at large.

My general education (within the Core framework then in place) yielded something not entirely captured by either the transdisciplinary values that are the stated goal of the current Gen Ed program or the interdisciplinary well-roundedness associated with distribution requirements.

What I learned over four years of fine courses on modern American poetry with Helen Vendler, on organic chemistry with Eric Jacobsen, on justice and medieval castles and civil infrastructure and the Vietnam War, was that the worlds of thought and of action—and of different forms of thought, and different kinds of action—can profitably be brought together in myriad ways. This is not so far from how Wang describes her experience: "I do earnestly believe that the values, skills, goals, and perspectives with which I approach the world have been shaped by my four years here."

I don't think that the integrating function these courses served for me was always consciously intended. But it could be, and I would argue should be, incorporated in the design of courses explic-

itly intended for general education. Such a requirement need not be onerous—it could take the form of one or two lectures in which a professor takes up subject matter usually associated with another discipline, or considers another discipline's perspective on the subject matter of her own.

An ambitious program of general education should not be merely a bulwark against excessive focus on a chosen concentration, nor merely a prod to push "excellent sheep" (in the words of Bill Deresiewicz) out of their pens. It should be a key that unlocks the methods of particular disciplines to be applied and adapted across the whole range of challenges that constitute, as the committee puts it, *ars vivendi in mundo*.

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TERRY MURPHY'S LETTER, "Undergraduate Education" (September-October, page 5), which laments—rightfully—the loss of the undergraduate General Education requirements of the 1950s, has one small error: John



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