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The Hutchins School of Liberal Studies at Sonoma State University: Creating Spaces for Interdisciplinary Creativity

The Hutchins School of Liberal Studies (Hutchins), a dialogic cluster school within Sonoma State University, creates spaces for creative growth for both students and faculty through use of undergraduate seminar discussions, symposia and field trips, student-centered curriculum, flexibility in both course structure and student assignments, and an absence of formal examinations. Through active participation in the Hutchins community, faculty creativity is enriched through: 1) course planning in collaboration with a cadre of five or six professors from varied disciplines who plan lower division classes; 2) introduction to new interdisciplinary ideas which may result in new avenues of individual scholarly research; and 3) the creation of upper division courses in alignment with faculty interdisciplinary interests and passions. Student creativity is encouraged through: 1) student centered and student driven curricula; 2) seminar discussions of “big questions”; 3) open-ended student assignments; 4) symposia and speakers; 5) field experiences; and 6) a sense of community. Through unique curriculum and many opportunities for personal connections between students and faculty, Hutchins encourages active learning, interdisciplinary connections, and integrative thought.

LOSING MY “DISCIPLINE”

When someone learns that I teach in a university setting, the first question they usually ask me is “what do you teach?” This question used to be easy to answer because I operated mainly within a set academic discipline – in my case, physical geography. Now the answer is more complicated, because I teach in the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies at Sonoma State University.

When I entered the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies (Hutchins) in 1999, I had been looking at pollen grains under a microscope and trudging through peat bogs for several years. Hutchins needed someone to create outdoor lab experiences for their students; I needed a place that not only tolerated my academic schizophrenia, but also embraced it. In Hutchins, having interests in bookbinding, creative writing, comics, caves, and art were not seen as diversions – they were viewed as assets, and would eventually become the foundation for some of my favorite interdisciplinary courses, field trips, and student projects. I first knew I was entering unusual waters when instead of presenting my scientific research during my job interview, I was asked to present the syllabus and content of my “dream course” – in this case “Experiencing Nature.” This was when I began to lose some of my academic discipline, and to find new spaces for creativity.

“HUTCHINS”: WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS

As Sill stated:

Creativity relies on non-logical and non-linear thought processes, filled with digressions and diversions. Creativity is a messy, complex process, and therefore difficult to confine within a simple, precise, definition. By its very nature, creativity violates the present order in creating a new order. (295)

Hutchins was constructed, in part, to “violate the present order” of 1960s academia.

The Hutchins School of Liberal Studies (Hutchins), named after Robert Maynard Hutchins (with his permission), was formed in 1969. Five dissatisfied faculty members of the newly created Sonoma State University (SSU) decided to create a “school within a school” that could overcome 1) passivity, 2) fragmentation, and 3) alienation through creating a pedagogy that, as the current Director of Hutchins, Eric McGuckin stated in 2003, “involves a serious commitment to “dialogic” (more than Socratic) learning... trusts students to take ownership of their seminars, demands that they construct their own meanings from each text, and encourages them to find their “voice” through writing. The process of collaborative learning is emphasized, rather than the mastery of any particular content” (Newell et al. 22-23; Olson 1).

Of the first five faculty members, only three survived the first year due to a battle over structure; the three who did survive thought that at least some structure was required – the two who left the program wanted students to have ultimate freedom from any faculty interference. Additional faculty members from various disciplines were subsequently hired to create what is now one of the largest and most robust departments at SSU.

The first Hutchins courses were interdisciplinary and structured around “big questions,” similar but not identical to “great books” classes. These beginning courses, though modified through time, are still the model for the four-semester lower division program in Hutchins. Each of these four classes is worth twelve credits and combines ideas from many disciplines to explore a central theme. These four lower division courses, “The Human Enigma,” (which explores questions of what it means to be human and how humans differ from other species, including Darwin’s theory of evolution) “In Search of Self,” (which examines concepts of “self,” individual personality expression, gender, and human physiology), “Exploring the Unknown” (which scrutinizes how humans explore the unknown both through religious ideas and through science paradigms like quantum physics) and “Challenge and Response in the Modern World,” (which studies ecology, and problems of globalization, wealth inequity, and social injustice) are planned by five or six faculty members from different academic disciplines, called a “cadre.” Each cadre

member adds their own expertise, in the form of books, movies, symposia ideas, or field experiences, to the courses they teach.

Each faculty member in the cadre teaches a smaller group of 12 to 15 students in a dialogic seminar format, and all of the seminar groups regularly combine into a large group to hear guest speakers, watch films, go on field trips, or have large group discussions. Upon completion of the four-semester sequence, students complete all of their general education requirements except mathematics. Some students choose to leave Hutchins after lower division to pursue other majors; many remain through upper division or stay connected to Hutchins through completion of a minor. Hutchins also includes a degree-completion program for students who wish to finish their BA through online discussion and weekend seminars, and a Master's Program, "Action for a Viable Future" which requires completion of a civic action project rather than a traditional thesis.

The upper-division Hutchins program has adapted to changes in academic requirements imposed since 1969, first by adding a pre-credential "teacher track," or "Track II" and even more recently by adding an accelerated "blended track," or Track III" that allows students to obtain both their bachelors degree and their teaching credential in four rather than five years. Through all these changes, the basic Hutchins major – "Track I" has remained a constant, though the majority of Hutchins students are in the "teacher tracks." Track I allows students to design a liberal studies degree according to their interests, and gives them the freedom to take courses in their "emphasis" from within the greater campus community as well as within Hutchins. Track I students also are required to take independent study classes, complete an internship, and if possible, "study away." All of the Hutchins tracks end with "senior synthesis," a capstone course, during which students compile a portfolio of their papers and projects, complete a final project, examine their writing and speaking skills, and write an "intellectual journey" paper.

Student and faculty interaction is maximized in Hutchins. Faculty members are known

by their first names and are seen less as authorities than as informed seminar facilitators. There are no grades in the lower division, and no exams in either lower or upper division courses. Students are given general, rather than specific instructions regarding assignment requirements, and often modify the assignments to fit their particular interests. Every participant in the seminar is seen as both student and teacher, whether student or faculty. Sill, in reference to integrative studies programs, states that:

Environmental factors can either encourage or discourage creativity, and an environment that encourages creativity can enable creativity in both the individual and the group. The implication is that through the shaping of class activities and assignments, the instructor can encourage integrative thought. (306)

Hutchins is an environment that creates spaces for both faculty and students to approach learning more creatively.

SPACES FOR FACULTY CREATIVITY

Cadres: Interdisciplinary Melting Pots

Tornqvist said, "Creativity flourishes when different specialities and competencies are squeezed together on a small surface. What is needed is a meeting-place for more or less random contacts and new combinations of pieces of information and fragments of ideas"(103). Putting five or six scholars from disciplines ranging from physics to poetry together into a small room to co-create a course is definitely "squeezing" different ways of thinking onto a very "small surface" and promotes faculty creativity. Cadres meet on two levels; once a week to discuss the current class they are co-teaching, and once a month to plan the class for the next semester. These cadre meetings give faculty members the chance to interact and to learn from each other, several times a month.

I was silent during most of my early monthly cadre-planning meetings. (Remember that my world had consisted of microscopes, pollen grains, and peat bogs for several years). My colleagues threw around book titles and names of philosophers like acrobats throw each other in Cirque de Soleil. I was afraid to get in the way, and also to admit that I had last heard of Descartes and Plato as a freshman in college. I think the only thing I added to that first course was a field experience at a regional park during which students measured stream capacity, tested soil properties, and identified a few plants – exactly what I had been specifically hired for.

I was also silent during most of the faculty meetings that first year – afraid of “doing it wrong” or looking as stupid as I felt. My experience was not unusual, most first year faculty members go through a major transition into this new culture, including mourning the loss of their disciplinary content and resisting the urge to control seminar discussions (Newell et al. 24). Over the course of that first year, I went privately from faculty member to faculty member, asking each instructor how to “do Hutchins.” The answers varied as much as the personalities of my colleagues. Finally, at the end of the first year, I finally realized that there was no one way to “do Hutchins;” that finding my own way was the only way that I would fully contribute from my disciplinary background and personal interests.

After that point, cadre meetings became one of my favorite spaces for creativity. During weekly cadre discussions and monthly planning meetings I learn details and ideas from a wide range of disciplines and from colleagues with fascinating backgrounds. One cadre member might mention his experiences growing up in pre-colonial Zaire, another his newest backyard laboratory invention, another her latest trip to concentration camps in Europe. During monthly planning meetings, each cadre member lobbies for course content they feel will enrich the course; one colleague might hope that we include short stories by Mexican writers, another a book about quantum physics, another poems by Adrienne Rich, another a Bollywood movie. I always learn something valuable from the unique disciplinary perspectives of my colleagues.

Tornqvist, speaking of his experiences in an experimental seminar of scientists and humanists from a wide variety of disciplines said, “a significant synergy effect calls for multiplicity and variation. Uniformity and homogeneity do not seem to form a suitable climate for creative processes” (105). Cadre meetings are synergistic. Together we create a richer experience for students than any one of us could create alone.

Additionally, faculty learning in lower division only *begins* with the cadre process; throughout the semester, we, along with our students, experience the texts, movies and field experiences brought into the course through the suggestions of our colleagues and by our mutual agreement. Even if a professor teaches the same two lower division courses every year, the content is constantly changing; usually 50% or more of the books, articles, field trips or symposia topics change each time a class is re-constructed.

Cadre Collaboration: Raw Material for Creativity

The greatest gift that the cadre process gives to me is the feeling that my creative ideas are valued and supported. I agree with Seamon that “beyond movement and dialogue, there is a need that the person involved in creative work feels part of some larger whole to which his insights can contribute” (62). If I feel supported in my creative excursions, I am more likely to think outside of my discipline. In fact, all of this new information from cadre meetings, intersections with new reading materials in lower division, and multiple perspectives from seminar discussions can spark creativity within professors as well as students, as faculty members encounter ideas and perspectives that would be impossible to even think without this disciplinary cross-pollination. As Boden states, “the deepest cases of creativity involve someone’s thinking something which, with respect to the conceptual spaces in their minds, they couldn’t have thought before. The supposedly impossible idea can come about only if the creator changes the preexisting style in some way” (6). Through contact with the ideas and perspectives of my cadre colleagues, I have been able to boldly think thoughts I could not have thought before.

Sill explains “integrative thought consists of taking disconnected material or ideas and synthesizing them into something new, a task that is certainly a form of creativity” (293). For example, most of my art and creative writing pieces are responses to ideas from lower division course material. Some examples include: a “reference slide” of cultural attitudes toward women, which stemmed from learning about issues of gender and social justice in “In Search of Self”; an oversized board game “spinner” that shows different countries and how the U.S. policies have negatively impacted those countries, inspired by teaching “Challenge and Response in the Modern World”; a 3-D collage of cocoons (world problems) and butterflies (possible solutions), which came from ideas in both “Challenge and Response in the Modern World” and “Exploring the Unknown”; a world tree sculpture from ideas in mythology and religion from “Exploring the Unknown”; creation of a comic about maps and world views, from the upper division class “Graphic Novels”; and a 3-D collage of photos and artifacts (gathered with permission) from Adams Springs, the site of a field trip in one of my upper division courses, “Terrain.” Curriculum that is always in flux keeps learning fresh for faculty, and through formation of new curriculum and instructor development, for students as well.

Upper Division Course Creation: You Mean I Can Teach What I Want to Teach?

In academia, much of the curriculum is set, or difficult to change. I teach one class outside of SSU, a world regional geography class at a local junior college. Teaching in a more traditional format at the junior college, I often feel restricted by the “have tos” imposed upon me by the requisite structure – requirements like tests, strict guidelines regarding what material must be covered for the class to be transferable to other schools, and the encouragement to use mainly lecture-based pedagogy. In the Hutchins curriculum, however, space for creative pedagogy is built into the system.

In Hutchins, every upper-division student is required to take one class in each of our four interdisciplinary core areas. Core A classes explore issues of history and society, Core B classes connect science to society, Core C classes include art and literature, and Core D classes delve into mysteries of psychology and religion. This system

provides ultimate flexibility for Hutchins faculty to pursue their individual interests as they create classes that contain elements from many different academic disciplines. The core class content guidelines are purposefully general, which allows each faculty member to craft classes that fit within the core areas and at the same time parallel the passions of the instructor. As one of my colleagues Tony Mountain said to his students, “If you can find a class that explores an instructor’s obsession, take that course.”

It is also possible for Hutchins instructors to teach outside of their academic disciplines by creating courses in more than one core area. In my first few years in Hutchins, I taught all Core B classes which aligned directly with my Ph.D. emphasis in physical geography – classes like “experiencing nature,” “caves,” and “terrain.” Over time, I took classes in artistic techniques and natural history at Point Reyes National Seashore and also received a grant to learn Polaroid Transfer techniques. I used this new expertise to create a Core C class called “Earth Art” which teaches students how to use artistic techniques to explore natural phenomena. Emboldened by my successful move into Core C, I developed another Core C class, “Graphic Novels” a longtime passion of mine, which subsequently led to an increase in the use of graphic novels in lower division courses as well. My newest foray, into Core D, is called “Personal Geographies” and uses scientific metaphors, maps and creative writing to explore personal history and sense of place. Most of my colleagues teach classes in at least two core areas, though they may have originally been hired to teach classes in only one. Rather than teaching the same classes every year, Hutchins professors are granted the rare opportunity to create new courses that reflect their changing interests and academic growth as interdisciplinary scholars. Creating new courses has also given me new creative space as an “excuse” to pursue academic interests outside of my discipline that I would likely not have had time or energy to otherwise explore.

SPACES FOR STUDENT CREATIVITY

I recently sent an email to current and past Hutchins students asking them how Hutchins creates spaces for their personal creativity. Their replies, coupled with my musings on the subject have led me to identify several ways that Hutchins promotes student creativity.

Student-Centered and Student-Driven Curricula: “This is Your Class, Not Mine.”

Hutchins professors make every effort to move responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student. Hutchins professors facilitate discussions rather than tell students how or what to think. Miller et al. pointed out that in active learning situations “although the teacher is present and engaged in the activities, active learning exercises place the learning responsibility into the hands of the student and require that the student come to class prepared to learn. This attitudinal shift alone will enhance learning because the student is ready and willing to participate” (1330). Hutchins students are usually prepared for class and interested in learning because they, along with their classmates, direct the flow of the seminar discussion. They become “co-learners, rather than passive recipients of knowledge” (Newell et al. 24).

In some of my upper division classes like “Graphic Novels” and “Terrain,” I come to class the first day with a bare-bones syllabus that only includes required information (like contact information and office hours), a few books to read during the first few weeks, and blank spaces for weekly topics. Then I hand out a list of possible topics or readings, and let students use the first day of class to create the course. They argue back and forth about what topics to include, what order to put the topics in, and who should facilitate the discussion of each individual topic. Students also have a voice regarding percentages to be assigned to each of the graded portions of the class as well – deciding how much each assignment will be worth. Based on comments from

student evaluations of these courses, students have a strong sense of involvement in the course because they helped to design and facilitate the class; they care about the course because it is as much their course as it is mine.

The Seminar: Broader Questions, Deeper Learning

The seminar is the bedrock of Hutchins pedagogy. Most lower and upper division classes are seminars, with the exception of a few large classes for teachers and a few workshop-based classes. The emphasis in most seminars is not with finding the right answer, but rather with asking the right questions. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi state that “the most important part of the creative process may not be the creative product... but may well be the framing, discovery, and envisioning of the creative question” (125).

Hutchins seminars tend to focus around large moral and intellectual questions rather than specific disciplinary material – in fact, most questions in Hutchins require perspectives and information from multiple disciplines to be understood (Newell, et al., 24). This is why Hutchins courses are interdisciplinary. Combining ideas from disparate disciplines can create creative tension, which leads to discovery. Sill states, “in general, creative tension results from the mind’s need to construct order turning in on itself. When two or more ordering systems (i.e., matrices of thought) contradict or conflict, then the mind feels tension until the conflict is resolved through the creation of a new order. Such resolution is an integrating thought process” (303). Since the Hutchins seminar combines the thoughts and opinions of all of the seminar participants and the author of the text, there is ample room for integrative thought as various ideas are presented and discussed.

Students see the seminar as an effective way to promote both learning and creativity.

Based on student answers to my question “How does Hutchins create spaces for personal creativity?” the seminar plays a big role in student learning. One student recently stated:

My Hutchins experience has taught me that ideas and thinking are much more interconnected than they may appear to be. By seminaring on a broad variety of topics and learning to connect information, I have gained a deeper understanding of myself and a better ability to explore why I think the ways that I do. I have gained information and even facts over the past five semesters, but more importantly, I have gained a better way of thinking deeper and more critically. I have learned how to research information on topics that I care about and forge connections between myself and information. I can listen to others ideas even if I don't agree, and I can separate myself from my personal opinions in order to explore a topic. (Postnick)

Other Hutchins students concur. One states that “if you get the right group of people together you are able to learn and explore in ways you otherwise wouldn't (Young, 2009).” another, that “the Hutchins Program encourages students to speak their minds and discuss important issues, which sparks creativity and learning” (Sully).

Not all seminars, however, work all of the time. Some students will come to class unprepared. Sometimes personalities conflict. Some students don't speak up often enough. Robert Maynard Hutchins, anticipating problems like this, said in an interview with Keith Berwick that “real dialogue is a very difficult thing and requires certain moral qualities. You cannot participate in the dialogue if you are a show-off; you cannot participate in the dialogue unless you really want to learn... but by what other method could you really obtain a clear and rounded view” (Berwick)? The main purpose of the faculty member in a Hutchins seminar is to help students work out these difficulties as a group. Often when a seminar isn't working, I will leave and have the students retrieve

me when they have decided on a solution. My absence allows the students to honestly and openly express their dissatisfactions with their peers without fear of it affecting their grade. Without fail, this method has helped students to solve their own communication difficulties.

For all of its possible flaws, "... the program works. Students do indeed learn what they desire to learn. More significantly, they retain what they learn, having "made it their own" through synthesis with knowledge obtained in other courses and with their own experience" (Newell et al., 25). Through the seminar experience, students learn from the text, from the instructor, and most importantly, from each other.

Open-Ended Assignments: "No, I'm not going to tell you exactly what to do."

In Hutchins, faculty members make every effort not to "spoon feed" students. As Sill pointed out:

E.M. Forster once stated, "Spoon feeding in the long run teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon." By engaging the student in the complexities of the material, interdisciplinary study attempts to go beyond spoon feeding so that the student learns not only the shape of the spoon, but the shape and nature of thought as well. (291)

For students already familiar with the shape of academic spoons, this sudden departure from lecture-based classes, rubrics and elaborate essay prompts can be disorienting – at least at first.

Students often resist not being told exactly what to do and how to do it. Assignments do come with guidelines, and yet are constructed to leave room for student interpretation. Inevitably in "The Human Enigma," the introductory class for freshman, and

“Introduction to Liberal Studies,” the introductory class for transfer students, a student will plead for, even demand, that I tell them “what to write about” in their first essay. They ask me to “give them the prompt,” or to “give examples of papers from previous years.” Hutchins professors rarely, if ever, oblige, and yet miraculously, by the end of the first semester in Hutchins, students usually don’t ask for specific direction in assignments any more. As one student stated:

Assignments were rarely given as essays, but more often as personal challenges, such as “put yourself in a situation you’ve never been in before and come back prepared to share your experience,” “as your final, I want you to learn a new craft of your choice and bring in your results to share,” “create your own graphic novel,” “create a waste management system for future colonies on mars” and so on...” (Simpson)

Spaces for creativity are opened wider when students have to discover and uncover their own topics and their own interpretations of assignments.

Some examples of student assignments, besides response papers and essays, include landscape photo essays, body sculptures, student centered voting symposia, laboratory-style write-ups of field experiences, short film projects, autobiographies, nature collages which include nature prints, Polaroid transfer prints, and block prints, nature journals, short comics, dances, musical compositions, carpentry, quilts, mobiles, graduate school plans, resumes, elementary school field trip plans, astronomical observation logs, food diaries, personal atlases, and diagrams or models of theoretical earthwork monuments.

Students, after surviving the initial shock of having to “feed themselves”, regularly seek out studies and experiences that support their developing interests and passions.

Students also create independent study projects, search out internship opportunities,

participate in study abroad programs, and create both a yearly literary magazine and community art show.

Symposia and Speakers: Multiple Voices, Multiple Perspectives

One of the hallmarks of lower division courses is the “symposium,” – occasions when all of the small seminar classes and cadre members meet together for large group activities. Some upper division classes also invite guest speakers to interact with their students. Students often comment that their interactions with speakers and information presented in symposia are life changing. Since entering Hutchins, I have witnessed student poetry slams, watched student-created films, participated in Sufi dancing and Chi Gung exercises, heard young women from different countries describe their experiences with globalization, heard the life story of a male to female transgender woman, heard students ask questions of a LGBTQ panel of their peers, watched movies on topics ranging from dystopic futures to media manipulation, been instructed in autobiographical writing techniques from the daughter of a beat poet, heard details regarding how an author created their most recent book of fiction, heard a lecture about cosmology from a physics professor, listened to a rabbi explain Judaism, and witnessed students share their feelings about 9/11 and Operation Iraqi Freedom. These opportunities to experience voices from within and beyond the Hutchins community have sparked student independent projects, art projects, essays, and other creative enterprises for both students and faculty members.

Field Experiences: Trips Away from the Center

Much of the curriculum in Hutchins happens in the familiar territory, the academic center of Hutchins – SSU. The physical center of Hutchins is in Rachel Carson Hall, a

collection of office-classrooms arranged in large connected squares around small open areas filled with benches, trees, plants and wildlife. Most Hutchins classes try to leave this common space at least once a semester in the form of a field experience. Lower division courses include multiple excursions away from campus each semester; these trips are designed to give students interdisciplinary and direct experiences that tie to curriculum. Many upper division classes also include field trips. Hensely reminds us that “engaging all the student’s physical senses in a learning situation provides support for engendering curiosity, and using problem-solving approaches to learning also helps foster inquiry” (32). Field experiences are an effective way to engage the students’ physical senses.

Field experiences are usually directly tied to the big questions and texts that the students are examining in seminar. Students take a ferry to San Francisco to visit the Museum of Modern Art to connect the experience of viewing art to texts about art history, use of visual imagery in media, and propaganda techniques. Texts about Chinese American experiences in the West prompt a visit to Chinatown, complete with dim sum lunch. Discussions of the underground in mythology and ancient religious sites lead students into the unfamiliar environment of caves. A trip to the Alternative Press Expo or to Wondercon allows students using graphic novels in class to directly experience comic subculture. Students learning about the role of garbage in society take trips to a local garbage dump. Excursions to Alcatraz or San Quentin are tied to issues of social justice. Studies of world forests and the study of biomes lead students to the California Academy of Sciences rainforest and coastal environment exhibits. Ecology studies at a local beach teach students about plant identification, soil sampling and other elements of salt marsh and dune habitats. Texts about water pollution lead students to collect and test water from local habitats, including campus water supplies. Questions of landscape history and archaeology lead students to Adams Springs, where they compare the foundations of crumbling buildings to photographs of those buildings at the height of the “springs” industry in early 1900s California. Students travel

to Bloody Island, the site of a local massacre of Pomo people at the hands of the U.S. army, hear stories and songs from descendants of the massacre survivors, and then tie these accounts to historical versions of the massacre; they also compare present environments near Bloody Island, through landscape analysis, plant and animal identification, and use of maps to the historical landscape described in early anthropological literature.

Field experiences encourage, and even require students to actively participate in their own learning. Active learning “provides opportunities for students to talk and listen, read, write, and reflect as they approach course content through problem-solving exercises, informal small groups, simulations, case studies, role playing, and other activities – all of which require students to apply what they are learning” (Meyers and Jones, xi). These experiences outside of the familiar environment of SSU encourage students to actively learn and then to apply their new knowledge as they create art, or poetry, or complete field experience reports. In the final Hutchins class, “Senior Synthesis,” students frequently mention field experiences as turning points in attitudes, as fodder for creative projects, and as highlights of the Hutchins experience.

An Extra Bonus: A Creative Learning Community

Hutchins is more than a major; it is a learning community. As Smith and MacGregor state:

Learning communities directly confront multiple problems plaguing under-graduate education: the fragmentation of general education classes, isolation of students... lack of meaningful connection-building between classes; the need for greater intellectual interaction between students and faculty; and lack of sustained opportunities for faculty development. (7)

A sense of community is heightened through repeated interactions between faculty, between students, and between faculty and students that arise in seminar classes. Crises like the sudden death of a faculty member, deaths of students, and 9/11 made this sense of community obvious and tangible as we met together to share our grief, laugh and cry the memories of the ones we lost, and discuss our shock and growing uncertainty.

Hutchins pedagogy fosters creativity as well as a sense of community. Leach argues that “creativity – be it in music, science, business, poetry, technology, education, art, industry, the philosophy of ideas or politics – can be viewed as an essentially social process: a process dependent on, and arising out of, the participation in particular kinds of communities, rather than any innate or unusual gift” (179). The social processes within Hutchins encourage students and faculty to find their own innate and unusual gifts; and though those gifts may not be world changing, they can be shared within an accepting environment and change the lives of individual members of the Hutchins community.

Hutchins also provides a nurturing space for new creative ideas. As Boden stated:

Creativity, whether in children or adults, involves exploration and evaluation. The new idea must be compared to some pre-existing mental structure and be judged to be interesting by some relevant criteria. A person who can evaluate their own novel ideas will accept them or (sometimes) correct them, but will often be unable to explain in just what way they are interesting. (63)

One of the benefits of the sense of community in Hutchins is that students feel supported enough to give voice to their new ideas, and also find a community of people willing to tell them how and why their ideas are interesting.

Hutchins also provides a sense of community through shared activities like an annual art show and reception, and publication of an annual literary magazine. Other group activities outside of classes include an annual trip to Bloody Island for a sunrise ceremony, and student-led activities through the Liberal Studies Student Association.

LOSING A DISCIPLINE: FINDING AN EDUCATION

In the end, perhaps the greatest benefit for me, personally, is that I finally feel “liberally educated;” educated far beyond pollen grains and peat bogs. I can now throw around titles and names of philosophers with my colleagues, even if those books and ideas lie far outside of my personal Ph.D. training. Though disciplinary knowledge gives much to academia and to the world, there is also much to be said for cultivating a broad-based interdisciplinary view of the world, especially while completing an undergraduate degree. I now believe that it is possible for an individual person to become a life long learner in multiple fields of knowledge. As Heinlein said in *Time Enough for Love*:

A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects. (238)

The more time I spend as a part of the Hutchins community, the more willing I am to give up a bit of my discipline to embrace new forms of creativity and community.

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