

A National Workshop on Research and Undergraduate Education at the Intersections of Culture, Mind, Brain, & Development

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Over the past quarter-century there has been a steady, and increasing, erosion of traditional disciplinary boundaries among fields concerned with Culture, Mind, Brain, and Development (CBD). Long-standing barriers to the interaction between, and integration of, the neural, psychological, and social sciences have begun to collapse. The need for disciplinary integration poses deep challenges for understanding the central questions that will drive future research, as well as for the organization of undergraduate curricula aimed at both liberal education and at the training of future generations of researchers. This 3-day workshop will focus on emerging trends in research and their implications for undergraduate curriculum development. The workshop will be attended by 35 leaders in interdisciplinary research and in undergraduate education. Participants will focus on productive engagement across fields that have traditionally emphasized different theoretical stances and methods. A special emphasis will be placed on developmental perspectives, which are a key to moving beyond traditional unresolved tensions, such as nature vs. nurture, universals vs. variation, or brain vs. culture. The activities at the workshop will include talks on current research and model courses or curricula, small-group sessions devoted to community building and issue definition, and final consolidating sessions at which an agenda for the future will be articulated. The outcomes of the conference will include (1) A final report summarizing the intellectual substance of CBD intersections and an agenda for changes in undergraduate teaching and learning to foster future research and citizen understanding; (2) A website with the results of the workshop and provisions for ongoing contributions from the CBD community; and (3) An edited book containing papers from the workshop; (4) Course and curriculum innovations initiated by workshop participants at their home institutions; and (5) Presentations of workshop findings, recommendations, and models at national academic conferences.

The workshop will promote the infusion into undergraduate education of new questions, interdisciplinary perspectives, theories, methods, and findings that are at an important frontier of contemporary science. One focus, on general education, will contribute to the education of a citizenry that can intelligently confront the profound moral and social issues that are arising from the convergence of biological and social science. The growing role of evolutionary theory, molecular biology, and neuroscience in the scientific understanding of mind and culture threatens traditional conceptions of free will, individual responsibility, values, life and death, permissible medical technologies, human origins, and the meaning of life itself. Changes that reduce the divisions among natural science, social science, and humanities curricula are required to prepare students to deal with these issues productively, rather than through avoidance or outright rejection of the relevant science. A second focus of the workshop, on upper-level undergraduate instruction, will enhance graduate training and scientific research by developing strategies to promote the interests and preparation of students at the intersections of culture, mind, brain, and development. New upper-level undergraduate courses and research experiences are needed to send students on to research careers armed with the right knowledge and prepared to ask the right questions.