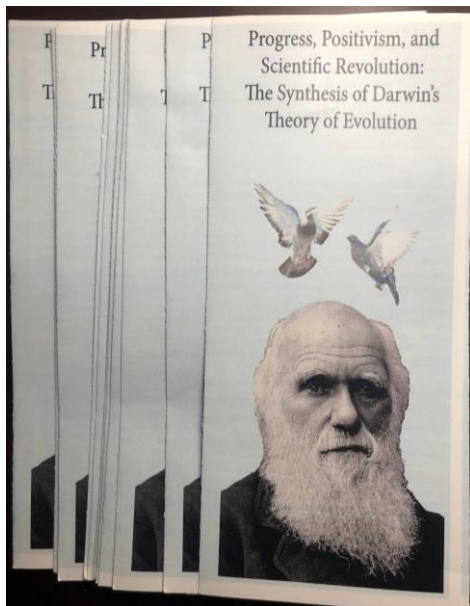


Project Narrative: Communicating Science Humanities Convergences

Many feel that science and the humanities are distinct and irreconcilable – one side deals with nature, while the other deals with beauty and morality. I attempt to challenge this false dichotomy in my Latham Science Engagement Project entitled “Progress, Positivism, and Scientific Revolution: The Synthesis of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution”. The goal of my project is to extend interest in science, particularly in evolutionary biology, to humanities graduate and undergraduate students. I distributed a brochure containing my writings on Darwin’s evolutionary theory using sociological and historical perspectives. I trace the intellectual milieu surrounding Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory, bringing into focus the historical, philosophical, and aesthetic contexts from which his theory arose. I bring to light the unnamed scientists from the masses, among them Wallace and Lamarck, who should all be credited with the theory of evolution. I endeavor to communicate the cumulative and interdisciplinary effort underlying scientific advancement.



Examination of the convergences of science and the humanities in the theory of evolution coincided with a flagship science communication event at the University of Iowa: Darwin Day. I collaborated with Darwin Day organizers to ensure a broad reach of impact for my project, opening access to a larger prospective audience. To find support for my project, I met with numerous faculty members involved in Darwin Day. I was able to get approved to distribute my brochure during the event, though the real benefit of these meetings was encountering individuals who harbor an infectious interest in communicating science! To research Darwin’s philosophical influences and its influence on philosophy, I reached out to an instructor in the Philosophy Department, who also gave me approval to visit his class to give a talk and distribute the brochure. To implement my project, I wanted to first broadly advertise Darwin Day, then reach individuals at a deeper level. On the week of Darwin Day, I contacted instructors and professors in the English Department, and received approval to deliver a brief presentation about evolution and distribute my brochure. These classes included a first-year rhetoric class, philosophy class, a foundations class for the English major, and a “Big Ideas” science lecture that is mostly taken by non-science majors. After asking many classmates and seeking participants from my classroom presentations, I assembled a focus group of six individuals pursuing different humanities degrees. This group contained three English majors, one English and Creative Writing major, one History Education major, and one International

Relations/French major. The focus group members attended Darwin Day events and filled out a survey gauging their interest in science from their humanities perspectives. I reunited with the focus group members after they attended Darwin Day events to discuss their impression of science outreach events and how topics in science relate to their respective fields. In the effort to establish breadth for my project, I was able to distribute more than 150 brochures during classroom presentations, and more during the Darwin Day events. The most difficult aspect of my project implementation was finding a receptive audience – it was sometimes very difficult to break through with college students who seemed apathetic about science-humanities connections. After completing my Latham project, I would go on to pursue other science outreach opportunities on campus. Reflecting on this first attempt at executing a science outreach project now, I realize that visual and tactile experiences are much more effective modes of communication than just text. I wish I made more of an effort to find creative modes of communication, rather than just making my audience read. I have also noticed that children are the most receptive audience for science outreach, because of their innate curiosity and openness. These interactions made me realize just how important it is to hold on to the vestiges of one's childlike wonderment of the world and resist the urge to become closed off to new information. In all, I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to share my project and increase awareness for topics that I am passionate about. Latham provided me an invaluable opportunity to grow as a scientist and communicator!

