

Presentation to Dr. Herb Jenkins at the 30th Anniversary Dinner, 24 Sept. 2011

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So many of us here today spent hours toiling in C-105 during our time in ArtSci, and so I wonder if you, like me, grew accustomed to the particulars of the space. How many of us for instance, ceased to notice the large framed portrait of a man with bright blue eyes, blue sweater and a shock of white hair that hangs on the back wall of the library? I'm not sure the exact moment I discovered who was depicted therein, for a while, I just assumed it was a brilliant western philosopher revered by an earlier class as an inside joke.

Indeed it turns out that the painting is of a brilliant experimental psychologist, whose greatest experiment we all have been the subjects of.

Ladies and gentlemen, Dr. Herb Jenkins served as the first director of the Arts and Science Program from 1981 to 1990. As director (and first year inquiry prof) he set the tone for the program, encouraging a sense of community among faculty and students, and some say, hosting impromptu "tea" breaks on Friday afternoons in the director's office.

But his involvement with the program did not begin or end there, and I wonder how many of us fully realize the impact of his dedication to the program, to its students, its community, and its curriculum.

After studying the so-called "innovative undergraduate programs" at McMaster for my ArtSci thesis, two things became clear. First, in a climate of increasing class sizes and streamlined instruction, for a program with a different set of values to emerge and survive, it needs a champion, and Herb, from the very beginning of being appointed to lead the committee to develop the idea of a program in General Studies, has been ours. In *Combining Two Cultures*, former Vice President (academic) Les King describes Dr. Jenkins as having the commitment and genius to build the strong foundations of the program, which as a result have ensured its ability to withstand numerous university retrenchments. In her chapter, Dr. Barbara Ferrier wrote that "the original plan has proved to be robust" evidenced by the fact that curriculum reviews over years of the program in practice had consistently reaffirmed the original model.

The second finding was that two of ArtScis defining elements, its focus on inquiry, and its strong community, were directly a result of Herb's vision of undergraduate education. And indeed, this vision was so inspired and successful that innovative programs since, such as Engineering and Society (which he also served as the first director of), the Bachelor of Health Sciences program and the new iSci program are all based on the "inquiry plus community" model. Financially, Dr. Jenkins would have done well to patent the formula while he still had a chance.

I first made contact with Dr. Jenkins during the 2005-2006 academic year, when word reached him that there was pressure from the university to immediately increase the size of ArtSci's incoming class from 60 students to 100. Herb wrote me wondering at the

current state of the debate and we planned to meet for the first of what would be many strategic sessions about the program. Full disclosure, I'm a bit of an Artsci groupie, so by the time I met Herb, I had read *Combining Two Cultures* cover to cover (and considered it my duty to do so) and was not sure what to expect from the brains behind the program. But what I found was a kind, thoughtful man, who is an exceptional listener – and while he had seen it all, he took my concerns seriously and set about contributing to solutions in any way he could.

After that expansion push, Dr. Jenkins again became involved with the program, working with passion on questions about its future. When, in 2006, the Undergraduate Program Review noted that current students held an overall negative assessment of upper-level inquiry, Herb struck back against the suggestion of abandoning them by forming the Inquiry Research Group with professors in the program and from elsewhere in the university, and worked tirelessly on the resulting report.

His work was not done.

During one of our discussions about how to protect the Arts and Science Program from future top-down attempts to change its fundamental structure, Herb suggested we conduct an alumni survey in order to find out what graduates were up to, and to have some statistics in the arsenal to argue that our students are learning skills which are important to their success in their future careers. Dr. Jenkins put all of his efforts into the survey, and when he treated me as equal partner in the project, rather than as a research assistant, I got a taste of what it must have been like to have him as director during those early years of the program.

What is most inspiring about Herb is not his commitment to his academic values, his work ethic, or his kind character. It is his irrepressible desire to learn. The last time I had contact with Dr. Jenkins he emailed to ask after my activities and when asked in return he mentioned he planned to audit an inquiry class in the Bachelor of Health Sciences program that semester to observe another instructor's methods. He wrote "I have decided to actually do my own inquiry in the course. I hope that will give me some new ideas that might be useful for helping students do inquiry."

Such openness to learn, observe and adjust his views on the topic, even after all he's accomplished is inspirational. One can surely argue that Herb is in many ways THE original ArtSci.

So this evening, as we mark the 30th anniversary of this, OUR humble and spectacular experiment, I am honored to award its champion, Dr. Herb Jenkins, with the first ever golden question mark, to thank him for teaching us all not just the importance of asking questions, but the importance of asking the right questions, and to never cease doing so.