GENETICS, PHILOSOPHY

A CRISIS OF PURPOSE, FOCUS AND CONTENT

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A Nature correspondence letter laments

Universities are experiencing a crisis of purpose, focus and content, rooted in a fundamental confusion about all three. The crisis is all the more visible as their pace of social, intellectual and technological change falls increasingly out of step with that outside. Furthermore, universities are largely reactive where they should be visionary and critical.

Of course, that's right – how to study "biology"? What's should be purpose, content and focus? Maybe that's easier with "medicine" although here focus is often lacking too.
The authors promote their website curriculumreform.org that has a manifesto with the following points

1. As a central guideline teach disciplines rigorously in introductory courses together with a set of parallel seminars devoted to complex real life problems that transcend disciplinary boundaries.
2. Teach knowledge in its social, cultural and political contexts. Teach not just the factual subject matter, but highlight the challenges, open questions and uncertainties of each discipline.
3. Create awareness of the great problems humanity is facing (hunger, poverty, public health, sustainability, climate change, water resources, security, etc.) and show that no single discipline can adequately address any of them.
4. Use these challenges to demonstrate and rigorously practice interdisciplinarity, avoiding the dangers of interdisciplinary dilettantism.
5. Treat knowledge historically and examine critically how it is generated, acquired, and used. Emphasize that different cultures have their own traditions and different ways of knowing. Do not treat knowledge as static and embedded in a fixed canon.
6. Provide all students with a fundamental understanding of the basics of the natural and the social sciences, as well as the humanities. Emphasize and illustrate the connections between these traditions of knowledge.
7. Engage with the world's complexity and messiness. This applies to the sciences as much as to the social, political and cultural dimensions of the world. Such an engagement will contribute to the education of concerned citizens.
8. Emphasize a broad and inclusive evolutionary mode of thinking in all areas of the curriculum.
9. Familiarize students with non-linear phenomena in all areas of knowledge.
10. Fuse theory and analytic rigor with practice and the application of knowledge to real-world problems.
11. Rethink the implications of modern communication and information technologies for education and the architecture of the university.

I like these points, in particular 1+2+3 although many in my seminars just want "just the factual subject matter", yea, yea.