

From Stanford University

Professor Marjorie Grene,  
Department of Philosophy,  
UC-Davis

October 29, 1974

Dear Professor Grene:

I was happy to receive your communication of Oct 22 on your plans for a National Humanities Institute.

It is an attractive, stimulating idea, and I would like to help -- within the severe constraints of temporal reality. Ideologically, I would put great weight on the interdisciplinary communication you seek to foster; and I have often puzzled what we could do to foster community as between UC and Stanford; and indeed within my own institution: the realizations are less evident.

If you really want to hear more from me, we should continue this discourse by phone, or perhaps a personal meeting -- (at Stanford? -- ah, there's the rub). I would need to know more about the shape of the programs before accepting a responsible role; but you may certainly use my name in your application as one of your "consultants".

To move from procedure to some substance:

1. You may be straining too hard for a UC-system wide effort, and for multi-departmental arrangements for their own sake. It is already difficult to make things move on a single campus; I can see some rationale for, say, the SF-Berkeley-Davis axis as the starting nucleus, and in that framework, cover Stanford as a source of auxiliary critique. (If you do go statewide, you should not overlook Caltech as a resource).
2. Alternatively, you might develop the substantive possibilities of efficient inter-campus educational cooperation. What is the existing pattern at UC? (I have often wondered what a helicopter-taxi service between UCB and Stanford would have done to the structure of research and scholarship at our institutions.)

Have you made much use of TV or telephone communication (hopefully high quality wide-band lines) for educational purposes?

3. The arrangements you specify are still notably deficient in people from the natural sciences. Whatever their uses and limitations as resources, they would be important as consumers, and perhaps also in the academic policy issues. Karplus may be helpful in identifying the most cogent possibilities. I did not see Wes Churchman's name in your prospectus -- he would be another portal.

4. May I ask you to send me the course catalogs (faculty directories for each of the prospectively participating (sic) campuses?

5. I am enclosing some information on our Program in Human Biology (of which I am one of the 'founding fathers'). This has some obvious parallels to your own aims. One of my main disappointments has been precisely the deficiency of humanistic content in our (formal) curriculum and academic planning. Part, doubtless not all, of our problem here has to do with the locally available disciplinary resources. (We have very little history or philosophy of science, for example, at Stanford; and ethics is sporadically attended to by mobile junior faculty; I was sorry we lost Tom Schwartz a couple of years ago.)

Another program, "VTS", centered in the Engineering School, may also interest you.

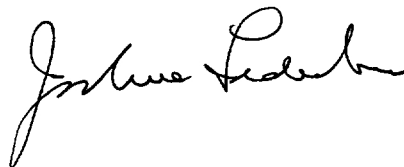
Note these are both undergraduate studies:

6. My "course" in genetics as a career is still a gleam, but I probably will do it next Spring. It is intended to meet the personal needs of students in my own department, which would be distributed by wider advertising. However, I am eager for help in framing it, reading lists, etc., and I would not object to accommodating one observer from your program. My future plans for such a course depend on the outcome of this experiment.

7. Who can quarrel with "personal identity" as the axial theme of ethics? While this has emerged publically perhaps most strictly in the context of the abortion debate, I have been wrestling more with the issues of continuity: physiological ("personal memory"); informational (in the tradition of the educator; genetic. As we approach the hypothetical possibility of (medical) immortality, or merely extension of life span, these issues will surely drive some of our most urgent conflicts of social policy. May I trouble you for the reference to Taylor's writings that you so admired?

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/s/



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