A SHOT IN THE DARK

Mark Trodden's Scientific Imagination Reshapes Our Understanding of the Universe
A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

Every year in Manhattan, over Mexican food and sangria, Steven F. Goldstone, C’67, and students on the Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) undergraduate advisory board hash out the program’s accomplishments and goals. “We have a great time,” he says, “but we also get down to business. We discuss what the program achieved over the past year, what the students want to do during the coming year, and how I can help them do it. It’s really fun to work with people who are motivated to make something better than the way they found it.”

The opportunity to work with PPE students has, in part, inspired Goldstone’s decade-long relationship with the program—one that extends far beyond his generous financial commitment to it. The partnership began when he and former Penn president Judith Rodin were discussing the challenges of convincing parents of the practical value of a liberal arts education. Rodin mentioned PPE, then a fledgling program that founder Sam Freeman, Avalon Professor in the Humanities, modeled after one offered by Oxford University. “I was immediately attracted to PPE’s cross-disciplinary approach to problem solving,” Goldstone explains. “It truly integrates philosophy, politics and economics to get to the fundamental rights and responsibilities of every citizen, and I couldn’t think of a better place for it than Penn.”

Over the past decade, Goldstone has donated $3.5 million to PPE to fund endowed professorships for faculty in departments involved in the program; student research; post-doctoral appointments and visiting lecturers; and programming like the Goldstone Forum, an annual lecture by leading figures in business, political and academic arenas.

Because he considers PPE one of his “best investments,” Goldstone makes sure to remain personally connected with the program. In addition to his annual lunch with the undergraduate advisory board, he visits campus during Goldstone Forums to meet with students and attend the lectures, and he consults with SAS Dean Rebecca Bushnell on PPE’s progress. He also works closely with program director Cristina Bicchieri, Carol and Michael Lowenstein Professor of Philosophy and Legal Studies, to discuss challenges the program may be facing and her plans to improve it.

“Cristina has amazing vision and a restless kind of energy that won’t allow anyone to rest on their laurels,” Goldstone says. “When you’re working with her, it’s onward and upward always.”

PPE has grown to become one of the College of Arts and Sciences’ most popular majors, attracting undergraduates for whom Goldstone feels a “renewed sense of respect and affection” each year. “PPE students are not narrow people,” he says. “They have broad interests, and they care about the School and about the quality of education they and their fellow students are getting.” He keeps in touch with a number of them after graduation, noting their success in fields as varied as law, journalism and education.

Goldstone looks forward to future collaborations with both the students and Bicchieri that will continue establishing PPE as the premier U.S. program in its area. “This requires intense efforts in team teaching and team learning,” he says. “It’s not an easy thing for a school to do well, but PPE has terrific leadership and a real commitment from Penn to make this valuable program work.”