

Human Behavior and Evolution Society Conference
University of Pennsylvania

Provost Ronald J. Daniels

Welcoming Remarks

June 8, 2006

Good morning, and welcome to the University of Pennsylvania. I hope you all managed to grab some of that delicious coffee in Houston Hall before making your way here.

At the risk of committing blasphemy before a room of evolutionary theorists, I have to say that a cup of coffee is often my best answer to the old Darwinian question of "How to survive?" But does it affect my mating strategies, my parenting style, or my ability to interact peacefully with strangers? I have no doubt that any one of you could give me a full, and humbling, report.

These days, just about every meeting or conference I am asked to address on Penn's campus speaks to our university's commitment to interdisciplinary studies. It is, in fact, a key component of our President Amy Gutmann's Compact. You might think I would tire of championing academic collaboration, the integration of knowledge, and scholastic fusion.

But, in fact, the opposite is true.

I uphold our penchant for interdisciplinary partnerships as one of Penn's best attributes, and it delights me to see that the larger academic universe has noticed it too.

You could not have chosen a better campus for your conference this year.

Along with our friend and neighbor, Drexel University, we are honored to be co-hosting this 18th annual meeting of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society. At Penn, we are particularly keen on the integration of the natural and social sciences, boasting faculty in several departments who are exploring evolutionary approaches to the study of human behavior.

In our psychology department alone, we hope to expand our social faculty by 5 hires in the next several years. The Biological Basis of Behavior program is an extraordinarily popular undergraduate major that gives both faculty and students the opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary projects. Meanwhile, graduate and undergraduate students

work as investigators, research assistants, and human subject participants in a variety of evolutionary studies. One of our finest graduate students, Lucy Faulconbridge (FALL-con-bridge), studies the neural and psychological mechanisms that underpin eating behavior, with the aim of understanding the obesity epidemic in the U.S.

In anthropology, biology, and sociology too, we are highly encouraging of interdisciplinary work, and Darwinian approaches in particular.

Our Center for Cognitive Neuroscience (CCN) is a community of psychologists, biologists, neuroscientists, anthropologists, linguists, lawyers, and philosophers who are dedicated to understanding the neural bases of human thought.

Our Solomon Asch Center for the Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict also spans the boundaries of science and social science toward a timely and vital consideration of historical violence, group identity and behavior, and post-conflict reconciliation.

From obesity studies to ethnopolitical studies, at Penn, we know that much of the world's most relevant work must be interdisciplinary work.

I'd like to thank your conference co-organizers, Rob Kurzban of Penn and Steve Platek of Drexel, for putting this week's program together. And on behalf of the University, I'd like to wish you all a vigorous and illuminating series of conversations over the next few days.

I think I can safely say that we will treat you well here, whether you are our kin, or no.