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Langara College creates a job-ready diploma program in applied social sciences and humanities

by Charlie Smith on March 6th, 2019 at 2:28 PM



A common criticism of education in social sciences and the humanities is that it doesn't provide the practical skills necessary to thrive in a technologically advanced economy.

But what if a social sciences and humanities diploma also included training in microeconomics and macroeconomics, entrepreneurship, business-computer applications, accounting for managers, and an introduction to programming and web programming?



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Then consider if this diploma also offers education in research methods in psychology, sociology, criminology, and anthropology, a basic understanding of statistics, and an introduction to social, personality, and abnormal psychology. Top that off with an introduction to government and politics, philosophy, and essay-writing and short-prose selections.



That's what's now being offered at Langara College in a unique two-year diploma program in applied social sciences and humanities—a.k.a. the DASSH. At the conclusion, students must complete a capstone project that more closely resembles a consultant's report than a final essay.

"They will work with a partner in business or a nongovernmental organization where they'll have a project or a role where we hope they will be able to make use of all the skills that they have acquired in the courses in the program," Langara philosophy instructor John Russell explained by phone.

Credits are transferable to university programs, which means students have the option of using this diploma as a ladder to a degree.

"One of the fallacies is you can just simply teach critical thinking," Russell stated. "Critical thinking depends on having a background of knowledge that is reliable and useful. If you don't have an awareness—a basic knowledge—then your assumptions are going to be faulty and any reasoning you use with those assumptions is going to be problematic."

DASSH department chair Colin Mills told the Straight that the curriculum was developed in response to recommendations from the Conference Board of Canada that workers have a rounded set of skills in the future. As part of the program, students are required to create an electronic portfolio on the Internet.

"There is a real skills focus rather than just a knowledge focus in the program," Mills stated.

He added that students will also be able to add citations to their DASSH credential based on electives that they take. For instance, they could graduate with a DASSH and a citation in environmental studies or a citation in American studies, which could be beneficial for their career development or for advancing into a university degree program.

Russell said the program was designed with learning outcomes in mind. He pointed out that people working in business and the nonprofit sector, particularly in management, need to know how laws are developed and how to read financial statements. In addition, anyone in marketing must understand how to assess populations and think about geography.

The DASSH diploma provides students with these insights.

"I think social-sciences humanities has gotten extremely bad press, but one of the reasons is that they haven't been able to defend themselves as well as they could because they have not been able to package and present what it is they provide in any systematic way," Russell said. "But we do think the programs like the one we've developed will do a better job of preparing social-sciences and humanities students for the workforce."



Part of the reason, he added, is because academic departments in universities are research-oriented and often function as silos, separated from one other. Langara, on the other hand, is a smaller institution with a mandate to provide students with employment skills.

At this point, Mills jumped into the conversation to say that Langara is ideally positioned to provide this because it has vibrant liberal-arts programs as part of its university-transfer offerings, as well as vocational and career training.

"This adding of these very practical skills is a way in which this knowledge can be actualized in the world," he said. "It can be turned into something."

For those interested in learning more, the college is hosting an information session at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 28, in room C408. You can also find full details of the program on the website.

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Charlie Smith has been editor of the Georgia Straight since 2005. Before that, he was the paper's news editor.

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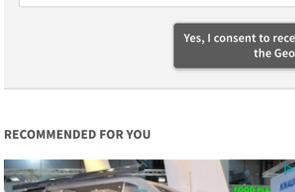
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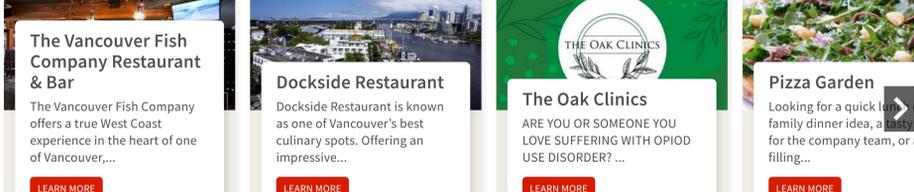
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