



H2O Carolina: Water in Our World

Some Background Notes for Humanists (and Others)

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Although most of the principals involved in formulating the original proposal for the campus-wide water theme come from the natural sciences and social sciences, all of us are cognizant of the profound role that water has played in humankind's cultural imagination over the millennia. Indeed, without a robust role for the arts and humanities, the water theme will fail to reach its full potential, if not fail altogether. It can be argued, in fact, that water *qua* theme is nearly as important to the arts and humanities as it is to the natural sciences and social sciences, albeit not quite so explicit. If "no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money"--as Samuel Johnson put it-- no one but a blockhead would attempt to catalogue the water theme in the arts and humanities. Suffice it to say that in one way or another, the theme of water infuses almost all disciplines at this university, and is omnipresent in some. Think for a moment of the place of water in the world's great religions, in literature, music, and art. One could readily organize entire classes around this theme--or even around water in one particular literary, musical, or artistic production/expression. In philosophy, there is hardly a more famous allusion than that of Heraclitus--quoted by Plato in the *Cratylus* dialogue--about the impossibility of stepping twice into the same river, and it was, of course, the polymath, Leonardo di Vinci, who believed that water was the driving force of all nature. Simply put, water--still undervalued and underappreciated by society at large-- is elemental.

Other schools are beginning to appreciate this fact and are exploring water in cross-disciplinary ways. In academic year 2010-2011, for example, the **University of Iowa** announced a plan for a university-wide "cluster hire" initiative to add ten new faculty positions "to advance research, education, and outreach on water sustainability."

<http://watersustainability.uiowa.edu>





In spring 2011, the **New School** in New York City organized an innovative week-long program called “Water (Dis)Courses,” which incorporated projects from design, fashion, architecture, urban planning, photography, film, environmental studies, politics, public health, and history.

<http://www.newschool.edu/events/waterweek/subpage.aspx?id=61738>

Stetson University in Florida has designated academic year 2011-2012 “Water Sustainability Year” on campus, and has developed campus-wide programming accordingly.

<https://www.stetson.edu/secure/apps/wordpress/?p=17217>

These initiatives—and others like them—are important, but our H2O Carolina proposal is at once more comprehensive and more ambitious. Our initiative is not planned for a week or even a semester, but for a sustained period of time, and our initiative is not limited to work on sustainability, however important, but to water wherever we find it in our curriculum, indeed, in our lives. By moving ahead with this bold initiative, we will once again demonstrate that we are the *leading* public research university in the U.S.

