

Big Questions in Academic Disciplines

Here I draw upon the outstanding contributions of participants in three Engage Grad/Faculty events hosted by US InterVarsity:

- Northern California grad students (Berkeley, Stanford, UC Santa Cruz, UC Davis)
- US Midwest Faculty Symposium
- US Midwest Graduate Student Symposium

These are **BIG TOPICS** that the students and faculty in these universities identify in their disciplines and faculties.

Engineering

- Energy and environmental issues: e.g., how to reach sustainability in use of resources?
- Water conservation: how to ensure worldwide supply of clean water?

Electrical/Chemical Engineering

- Deep neural networks
- Artificial intelligence
- Virtual reality
- The big question of technological advancement – is it helping us? How does it affect how we relate? How do we use it and encourage its benefits?

Computing

- Human-computer interactions
- Strong artificial intelligence (AI) – what is intelligence? What are we striving for? Is it even possible anyway? If it's possible, we need to ask big ethical questions
- The study of our own limits – computability theory
- Where does the strong AI question lie with respect to computability?

Humanities

- How to be open-minded to all perspectives
- Integration of people coming from diverse backgrounds
- Focus on the marginalized – fighting against the systemic oppression of these groups, and finding cohesion

Social Sciences

- What is human nature?
- Rational choice theory – the tension between structure and human agency
- Inequality and power – how are they distributed? How do we reduce inequality?
- How fluid is sexuality? Which family structures are healthy?
- What is the university? Can it be a place for discussion for even very unpopular views?

Physics, Earth Sciences

- Climate change: how do we address it? How can we reduce emissions? What are ways to protect humans from adverse effects of climate change? How to affect policy
- Drones
- Oil prices and the Middle East
- The problem of inducing seismic activity with human activities – e.g., fracking

Biosciences/Life sciences

- Gene editing and related bioethical questions
- Compassion fatigue in biomed; financing issues but it doesn't help
- Intellectual property as it applies to bio techniques and genetically modified living things
How are we treating our samples, lab animals?

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Participants: US InterVarsity staff

Place: Mundelein, Illinois

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