est in the humanities had declined, while job-related fields had become much more popular nationwide. Kloppenberg attributed the shift to both economic and intellectual factors, as support for general education and an agreed-upon set of classic works and ideas gave way to more skeptical methods and to specialized research. Increasing specialization intersected in turn with student emphasis on jobs over meaning. All this pushed questions about how one should live one’s life to the margins.

He wondered whether FAS could agree on a common content for general education, even as students need coherence of some sort or other. The Core curriculum, he noted, was an agreement to disagree: to teach methods and modes of knowing, not a common corpus of knowledge. Absent such agreement, he speculated, the faculty might move toward less curricular constraint and a freer elective system for students.

Since the 1970s, student interest in the humanities has declined, as job-related fields have become much more popular.

The Medical School’s Marc W. Kirschner, Walter professor of cell biology and founding chair of the new department of systems biology, detected no such self-doubt or skepticism within the burgeoning life sciences. Rather, he worried about adequate scientific education for students concentrating in other fields, and about training undergraduate biologists broadly enough. He lamented high-school and college courses of study focused only on recent achievements in molecular and cellular biology and genetics. Missing, he said, are two ingredients. First are the related sciences (chemistry, physics, mathematics, and computer science) required to do biological research today, and the broader studies (in anatomy and physiology, for example) needed to pull together the emerging systemic view of living organisms. Second is a sense of the most challenging problems still awaiting research and discovery—the very reason for doing science.

Between these poles, Johnstone Family professor of psychology Steven Pinker drew upon his work in understanding language to make a vivid point about interdisciplinary scholarship. In the future, he imagined, moral philosophy would depend on psychological tools and an understanding of evolutionary biology, poetry studies on linguistics, and analysis of global warming on atmospheric science and economics alike. That convergence,