



NORTHWESTERN IS ONE OF THE FEW PLACES WHERE UNUSUAL PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN DISCIPLINES ARE NOT ONLY POSSIBLE, BUT ENTHUSIASTICALLY EMBRACED.

GREETINGS FROM NORTHWESTERN ENGINEERING

One great pleasure over the past several years leading Northwestern Engineering has been the development of new initiatives to connect different disciplines. One of our most successful has been at the interface of art and engineering. Northwestern is one of the few places where unusual partnerships between disciplines are not only possible, but enthusiastically embraced.

Though art and engineering are considered two different fields in today's academic setting, it is only recently that they became separate domains. My colleague Adrian Randolph, dean of the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, and I recently wrote about one famous landmark that continues to serve as an example of the power of interdisciplinary thinking: the Brunelleschi dome in Florence, Italy.

Precisely 500 years ago, the city of Florence held a design competition for a dome for its unfinished cathedral. After winning the commission, Filippo Brunelleschi not only had to tackle aesthetic and engineering problems but also invent and construct machines for transporting and maneuvering materials. The result was spectacular: the first octagonal dome in history built without a temporary wooden supporting frame.

In addition to being known for the dome, Brunelleschi performed optical-geometrical experiments that were pivotal in the development of systematic linear perspective and also wrote poetry,

designed settings for theatrical performances, and broke new ground in the field of sculpture, painting, architecture, and engineering.

He was amazing, but there were many like him. He died six years before Leonardo da Vinci was born. How could a city of 60,000 people produce so many people who felt at home in multiple domains? This was a time when there were fewer defining boundaries and art, science, and technology were seen as one.

In many of my talks and opinion pieces, I have joined colleagues in calls for reconnecting these disciplines. Our partnership with the Block Museum of Art is an ideal catalyst for this. As you will read in this issue, this partnership has resulted in visiting interdisciplinary artists and an exhibition that perfectly exemplifies these ideas. The partnership is just one of many collaborations within Northwestern and with outside partners designed to create opportunities for different disciplines to collide. These experiences help our students and faculty expand their thinking skills, unlocking new avenues for discovery and innovation.

As always, I welcome your feedback.

JULIO M. OTTINO
Dean, McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science

On the Cover

Visitors got an inside view of a 2,000-year-old mummy this spring at the Block Museum. Read more on page 14.

Image courtesy of the Block Museum.

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