

“We are the finches.”

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Opening Remarks to the 2nd Khoury Teaching Workshop:
CS for All – Creating an Inclusive Classroom

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Hello everyone and welcome to this, the second in a series of Khoury Teaching Workshops. Today’s topic: “CS for All: Creating an Inclusive Classroom”. First, I want to thank the Khoury Staff, Taryn, Dannie, Heather, and Mabella, who worked so very hard turning vision into reality. And I want to especially thank our west coast faculty for their role in shaping the agenda, for hosting this event here on the lovely Mills College campus, and for their active participation in today’s event.

On the 27th of December 1831, nearly 200 years ago, the HMS Beagle captained by Robert FitzRoy left Plymouth Sound England, on a journey of discovery to survey the Tierra del Fuego archipelago that forms the very southern tip of the South American continent. Aboard the Beagle was a young 22-year-old student of geology and collector of beetles name Charles Darwin. The voyage of the Beagle, originally planned for two years was extended to nearly five. It traveled up the western coast of South America, famously stopping at the Galapagos Islands before crossing the pacific to Sydney, eventually reaching Cape Town South Africa, Cape Verde, and the volcanic Azores before finally return home to Plymouth on the 2nd of October 1836. Upon his return to England, Darwin never again left England’s shores.

Darwin’s theory of Evolution by Natural Selection was of course strongly shaped by his detailed observations and extensive collection of fossils accumulated during the voyage of the Beagle. But evolutionary theory was neither a “eureka” moment of enlightened discovery, nor the inevitable consequence of inductive reasoning on Darwin’s part. The late Harvard paleontologist, Stephen Jay Gould, reminds us that *great ideas, like species, do not have “eureka” moments of sudden formulation in all their subtle complexity; rather, they ooze into existence along tortuous paths lined with blind alleys.*¹ Darwin was an inclusive thinker, drawing upon geology, natural history, anatomy, philosophy, and

¹ Gould, S. J. (1993). *Eight Little Piggies: Reflections in Natural History*. W. W. Norton & Company.

economics in formulating his astonishing theory. It was a true synthesis of eclectic ideas and diverse points of view. You probably know where I'm going with this.

Darwin saw in the diversity of finches beaks and tortoise shells the creativity of nature writ large: Individual organisms, struggling for their own survival, yet creating together a view of life full of grandeur. We know, today, that natural biological ecosystems are healthy, sustainable, resilient, and most able to adapt to environmental change when they are inherently biodiverse. Intellectual diversity is no less important in sustaining a vibrant classroom environment. But student diversity alone, whether cultural, political, or socio-economic, has no function and provides no catalyst for innovation or intellectual growth unless divergent points of view are afforded equitable treatment and are ultimately included and welcomed into the roundtable of discussion. In affirming the values of inclusivity and belonging, we as a university form an essential levee against the rising tide of demagoguery which would seek to undermine diversity, rational debate, and academic freedom.

There is an old proverb, whose origins are shrouded in as much mystery as the origins of life itself:

If you want to go fast, go alone.

But, if you want to go far, go together.

So, thank you all for coming. I wish you an enriching day filled with a panoply of diverse thoughts and points of view. As always, I hope these talks, breakout sessions, and our panel discussion will both provoke and inspire and serve as a creative catalyst for a Cambrian explosion of new ideas.

Thank you.