Benjamin Franklin Project sponsors conference on institutional innovation

Utsav Gandhi
CAMPUS EDITOR

The IIT College of Social Sciences continued the Benjamin Franklin Project with an interdisciplinary conference on institutional innovation, exploring various historical and current perspectives on how institutions can provide the framework for revolution.

After multiple panels during the day on how academia, industry and the public sector can provide incentives and frameworks for innovative thinking, the evening witnessed an enlightening panel on curating innovation, talking about the role of local and national museums towards the same pursuit.

Kurt Haunfelner, from Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry (and previously, Walt Disney Imagination) in charge of the conception, design, budgeting of visitor experiences, spoke about the museum's vision and mission statement as the important and compelling agenda in defining innovation as it applies to this context. Quoting Nolan Bushnell, the founder of Atari, "everyone who's ever taken a shower has an idea. It's the person who gets out of the shower, dries off and does something about it who makes a difference."

Talking about today's ubiquitous digital media landscape, the other panelists, from Adler Planetarium, International Museum of Surgical Science, and the National Museum of Health and Medicine, talked about how attention spans are shorter and there is greater competition for people's leisure time; museums these days make use of leading edge science and technology to conceive and design exhibits and guest-centered experiences to sustain what Haunfelner called the "the inspiration business." The International Museum of Surgical Science, on the city's north side, was talked about as having used the direct method of curation to showcase medical innovation, such as Edward Jenner and his work with the smallpox vaccine, or a 3D printed heart model. Sarah Cole from the Adler Planetarium talked about astronomy and astrophysics since the 1930s, along with the changing nature of science–with all its voting, debate, and discussion. Being in the same room as the object and artifact, digitization of archives such Herschel and Uranus–this is the kind of "spectacular realization" that the planetarium hopes to let its viewers discover.

At a previous discussion on the same day, moderated by Jeremy Alexis from the IIT Institute of Design, academics and industry practitioners from Brown University, Argonne National Lab, University of Illinois and Stevens Institute of Technology, came together to discuss conceptualizing innovation, talking about code based design, the commercialization of science, trends in international economic development, the interaction of business and politics to frame what is now known as "innovation policy"–all these elements coming together for rapid technological change. The focus was to shift the discussion away from talking about the creator of the idea to the first customer.

At another panel on Friday, academics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design (CIID), along with Jennifer Phillips, University Relations Manager for Google and IIT's very own Professor of Political Science, Dr. Laura Hosman, talked about structures and frameworks for creativity and innovation within the education sector. Dr. Hosman talked about her multiple experiences working on collaborative projects outside the classroom, sharing some big picture lessons on presenting challenges outside of students' comfort zones and creating multidisciplinary partnerships towards the same regard.

Dr. John Zumbrunnen from the University of Madison spoke about "blended learning" efforts and innovative use of classroom spaces. Jamie Allen from the CIID talked about the research, consultancy and design work that the institute is known for, comprised of non-accredited degree programs where students attend purely because they want to be there rather than for the sake of a degree. With a studio oriented environment, the program runs through foundations, investigations and a final project over the course of a year, with the Danish Ministry of Culture supporting the institution in using technology as a design resource. "In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up," he ended, leaving the audience thinking.

Finally, Jen Phillips from Google talked about using disruptive technology for education and innovation, as it aids Google's overall mission of focusing on the user, being fast rather than slow, and a culture where great isn't good enough. Supporting the next generation with bottom up collaboration and sustainable partnerships, Phillips gave examples of using MOOC frameworks like Course Builder and path breaking technology like Google Glass.

Overall, the conference provided ample opportunities for engaging discussions, conversations and sharing ideas on how we can continue to create the foundations and frameworks necessary for continual innovative thinking–the sure path forward for human progress.
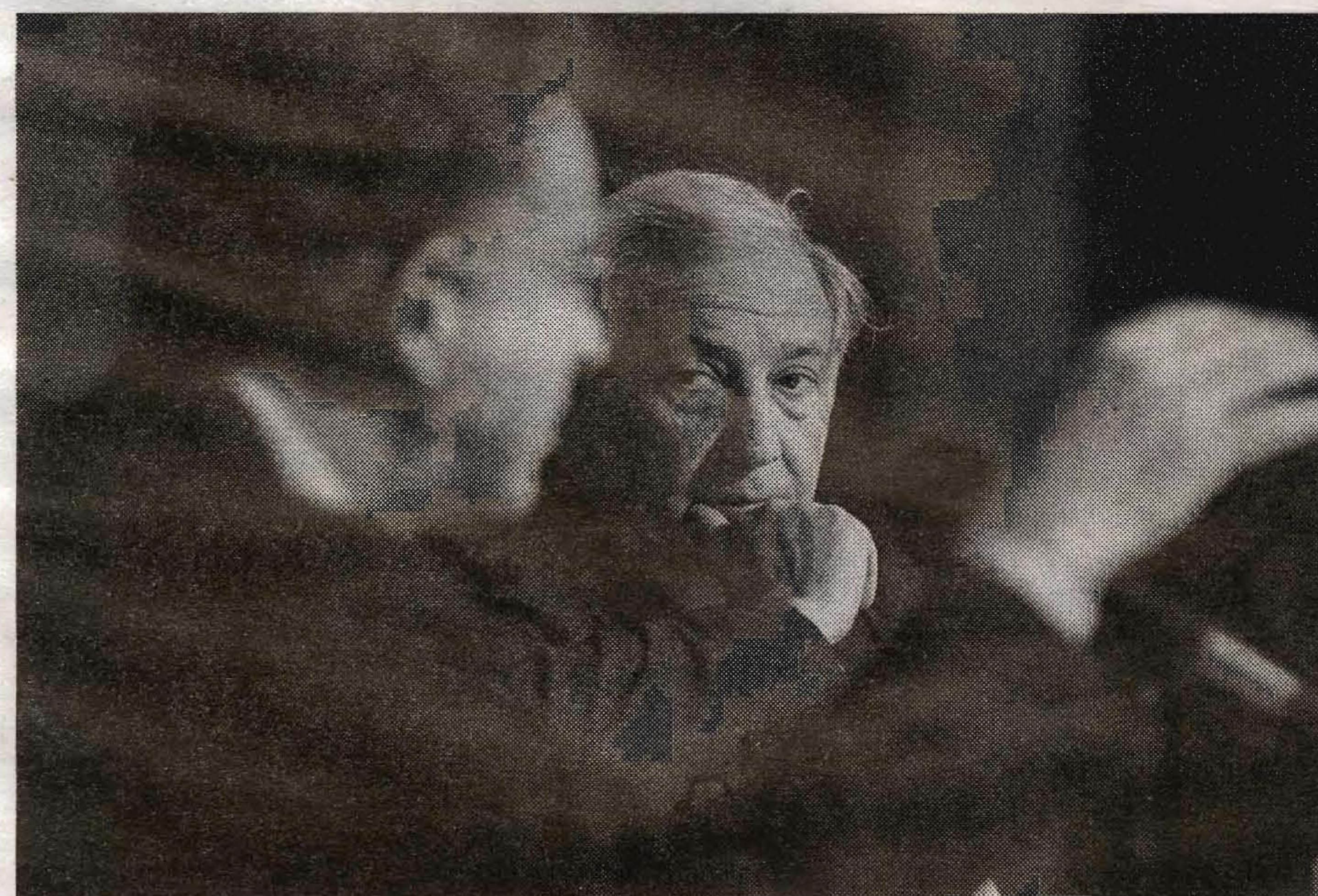
Photos by & courtesy of David Schalliol

WIIT, SGA host interview with President Anderson

difference, take a look at Student Speak. There've been a lot of changes in the university as a result of student speak." President Anderson then added that information in regard to university expenses is more difficult to be transparent about, as much of the school's expenditures go toward salaries.

One of the final questions of the interview asked about what President Anderson looks forward to in the coming year with new SGA Executive Board elected. He answered that he looks forward to continuing conversation between students and administration, as communication is the most important thing for mutual success.

An additional question came from Utsav Gandhi via Facebook, asking if the president had any advice for soon-to-graduate students. "I think you have to work hard, there's no substitute for that. There's a lot of smart people in the world, and its usually the effort that wins in the end," said President Anderson. "IIT students are tough, and I think employers recognize that. Keep that toughness, be dedicated to hard work, keep your eye on the ball and do the job at hand."

"When you take that initial job, don't worry about it being perfect," he added. "Find something where you can grow and do things well. It might not even be the best paid. Go for something that will provide potential."