Welcome to *jur*

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Communicating across disciplines is a challenge that faces students and professionals alike. Over the years, various disciplines have created their own languages, which has made communication across fields as difficult as interpreting new dialects. While members of each discipline can communicate with each other, the biggest challenge, however, is communication across disciplines. The need to communicate across disciplines becomes even more critical for teachers and students, who need to have a broader perspective than the particular subject they are studying.

The ease, as well as medium one chooses to explain and convey a particular subject, is extremely important for the idea to become useful. For example, in a world where there are limited resources, a medical doctor who does not understand the value of cost effective treatment will not be able to communicate with policy makers whose job is to ensure equity and cost effectiveness. There are only very few occasions where the same medical doctor will be able to order tests and drugs without taking the economic status of his patient, and the circumstances under which the insurance or other system operates in a particular place. This becomes even more important in resource-limited settings with multiple priorities.

*jur* provides the beginnings of an interaction across disciplines. Good and simple communication presupposes the knowledge of the discipline that is being discussed. The art of communicating with others in a simple way enables the audience to understand and appreciate subjects beyond their expertise as well as place them in context. Let me cite two very simple examples. In 1984 when the HIV/AIDS epidemic was new to most parts of the world, a few of us (medical doctors, economists, immunologists and epidemiologists) were asked to explain the HIV/AIDS epidemic to the public. While most were trying to explain the way the virus was transmitted using very complex scientific jargon, the explanation given by one of the panelists using an analogy of two trees, one healthy and another infected with a very common tree bug, made a lasting impression among the public. Similarly, in a recent visit to one developing country that has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates, and a reluctant government that has remained unresponsive, we asked the president of the country how devastating a recent bombing in the capital of the country has been. The president, unaware of where the discussion was leading, was explaining the gravity of the bombing. The person who asked the question asked the president if he knew that the number of people infected in his country on a daily basis was like having four of those bombs on a daily basis. The president stood up and said, “Why was this not explained to me in such a way?” This simple manner of communication resulted in the immediate release of a health education material to students that has previously been banned because religious leaders felt that they made young people promiscuous. Communication across disciplines and the ease with which complex issues need to be communicated to those who need to benefit from exciting knowledge is a skill in itself. In my twenty years of professional life, the biggest challenge for me has been to explain the science of immunology and infectious diseases to economists and policy makers whose major concern is cost effectiveness, while mine is saving lives. In time, I have learned to speak the language of policy makers and economists without which I would not be able to be as effective. The paramount goal of communication should be a message that is easily transmitted, as well as understood. I congratulate the *jur* staff for providing a forum that fosters this goal.

Sincerely,

Dr. Debraework Zewdie