Georgia Tech cited in Poland as exemplary for integrating the humanities and science/technology

Recent demographic trends in Poland have resulted in a smaller number of students at the country’s universities. At the same time higher education reform in Poland stimulates competition among universities. And this competitive climate has led to a focus on the role of the (useless?) humanities and their place within a quickly modernizing Central European society.

On Monday, February 23, as a widely received contribution to this debate, the Polish Higher Education Return on Investment Report (HE ROI) was published by Gazeta Wyborcza, entitled “What to study to be wise, fulfilled and rich?” As a follow-up, Gazeta Wyborcza invited its social research data columnist, sociologist Piotr Toczyski of the Polish Academy of Sciences, to respond to the results of the report. Toczyski, in an article entitled “What to study to be wise and rich. The West wants humanists again, so what about us?” pointed to the ways in which humanities curricula have begun to enrich the ever-changing information societies, specifically at institutes of technology. In Poland, salaries for graduates of Polytechnical Institutes are generally higher than for graduates of traditional universities. Toczyski points out that an innovative liberal arts college like Georgia Tech’s Ivan Allen College presents a case in which the customary dichotomy between humanities and technology/science is challenged. By a conscious effort at creating convergences between technological and non-technological competencies, curricula at U.S. technological universities succeed at narrowing the competency and salary gaps visible in Polish higher education. Moreover, Toczyski recommends that salary at graduation should not be the sole measure of an effective educational experience. He mentions Georgia Tech and the appointment of Richard Utz as chair of the School of Literature, Media, and Communication in 2012 as an illustrative example of an emerging trend, the re-connection of science/technology and the liberal arts:

Richard Utz, a medievalist and a scholar of the reception of medieval culture in postmedieval times, is well-known in specialized circles. In the official university memorandum on his appointment, Utz declared that he would be building bridges between the sciences, technology and humanistic inquiry, as this is the only way in which it is possible to respond to the complex social and cultural challenges of the future. He also spoke of creative interdisciplinary co-operation. During an annual medievalist congress preceding his move to Georgia, word got out that Utz’s hire by Georgia Tech might be seen as something like a response to MIT’s increasing incorporation of the humanities into their programs. Even though technological institutes will not re-create traditional university curricula in their entirety, they are beginning to understand the importance of the humanities. They are clearly concerned about an unreflective fascination with technology as well as an engineering science devoid of ethics.