Minerva: A New Kind of Higher Education

Founding Dean of Minerva Schools Stephen Kosslyn to Report on Year One of Unique Global Undergraduate Program

BERKELEY, CA, September 21, 2015 – Dr. Stephen Kosslyn, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Minerva, will speak at Berkeley on Sept. 21 on key aspects of the Minerva program, which globally immerses students of the virtual campus as they study in cities around the world. The Minerva Schools at the Keck Graduate Institute (KGI), established in 2014, is a four-year undergraduate program founded as a partnership between the Minerva Project and KGI. Minerva’s founder, Ben Nelson, former Snapfish president, has scrapped every commonly held assumption about how people should be educated. Minerva offers a newly invented curriculum, cultural immersion, and small interactive online seminars to prepare students to become global leaders and innovators. Nelson states, “We are effectively building a perfect university and we are trying to educate people who we would be excited to see in positions of leadership and influence in the world.”

Minerva has no classroom facilities. All students absorb the curriculum through a proprietary online platform, The Minerva Active Learning Forum, which is focused on participation and intellectual engagement.

Living together in Minerva residence halls, students begin in San Francisco and reside in up to seven cities around the world over the course of four years. Each city becomes the campus and each location is selected for its global significance, providing multiple vantage points for deep cultural understanding and numerous educational, social, and community-building opportunities. Currently, Minerva maintains only one permanent residence hall, in San Francisco. In 2016, the school plans to open residence halls in Berlin and Buenos Aires, with future housing planned for Seoul, Bangalore, Istanbul, and London.
All seminars are face-to-face in real time with a professor guiding the class virtually. Minerva systematically applies a 1972 study demonstrating that memory is enhanced by “deep” cognitive tasks such as working with material and applying it and arguing about it, instead of rote memorization. The courses are conducted as online seminars capped at 19 students, and traditional lectures are banned.

While most highly selective American universities give preference to students from the U.S., and to legacy applicants and recruited athletes, Minerva students are selected purely on merit, with no consideration given to gender, nationality, ethnicity, or social status. Minerva received 2,464 applications for its 2014 Founding Class and accepted 69. The 2.8% acceptance rate made Minerva “the most selective undergraduate program in U.S. history.” Highly selective admissions are balanced by a low tuition cost of $10,000 per academic year and a financial aid program that makes a Minerva education accessible to all students. Each of the 29 matriculated students in the 2014 Founding Class received a full four-year scholarship.

Minerva was initially funded in 2012 by $25 million from the venture firm Benchmark Capital. An additional $70 million in funding to Minerva Schools at KGI was announced in October 2014.

Stephen Kosslyn joined Minerva in 2013 after serving at Stanford University as Chair of the Department of Psychology and Dean of Social Sciences. He also served at Harvard University as Professor of Psychology. Kosslyn notes, “When asked why did I leave established, elite universities, like Harvard and Stanford, for a radically new concept in higher education? The answer is simple: I wanted to help build something better.”

**Carol Christ, Director of Center for Studies in Higher Education, will moderate the presentation by Dr. Stephen Kosslyn at The MATRIX, 8th Floor Barrows Hall, from 4:00-6:00 pm on Sept. 21.**

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**Stephen M. Kosslyn** is the Founding Dean of the Minerva Schools at the Keck Graduate Institute. He served as Director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University and was previously chair of the Department of Psychology, Dean of Social Science, and the John Lindsley Professor of Psychology at Harvard University. He received a B.A. from UCLA and a Ph.D. from Stanford University, both in psychology.

**Carol Christ** is Director, Center for Studies in Higher Education, UC Berkeley; the former President of Smith College; and the former Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, UC Berkeley.

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