



## *Jefferson should include humanities research labs to offer diverse learning opportunities*

Jefferson prides itself on offering students the freedom to choose--be it an elective, a sport, an extracurricular activity or a research lab. But for a school so firmly committed to student choice, its senior research opportunities leave a significant option completely off the table.

Yes, Jefferson is a science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)-centered school. Yes, its students apply seeking cutting-edge equipment and in-depth scientific inquiry. But a copious amount of STEM opportunities and research labs does not excuse a total lack of humanities ones. Jefferson offers 14 senior research labs, the Jefferson Underclassmen Multidisciplinary Projects (JUMP Lab) and mentorship

### *LEAD EDITORIAL*

opportunities off-campus -- but not even one research lab for the humanities.

Why is this a problem? First and foremost: the humanities are essential to education, whether a student pursues a STEM career or not. The humanities instill in students the ability to communicate-- the ability to express their ideas in a coherent and comprehensive manner. No scientific discovery would make it past the lab without clearly-written research report--and if a scientist's words are indecipherable, then his or her research is a moot point. The lack of a humanities research lab at Jefferson sends the message that the humanities do not pull as much

weight as STEM fields do--when, in reality, that statement could not be more false.

At first glance, a humanities research lab doesn't seem necessary: after all, students apply to Jefferson in search of a STEM-centered education. But blindly assuming that every single thirteen-year-old submitting his or her application will remain committed to the sciences alone is naive, at best. Jefferson encourages curiosity and experimentation--both in terms of curriculum and in student interest. Students at Jefferson may attend with the end goal of completing a science-based senior research project. There is no problem with that. But as years pass, student interests may change. A freshman interested in biology may shift



Senior Gopika Rajanikanth conducts research in the biotechnology senior research lab. Jefferson has 14 science research labs, but no humanities research labs.

to a senior majoring in foreign policy, and a ninth-grade aspiring engineer may end up a graduating journalist. Jefferson should respect the interests of these students in addition to those who are passionate about STEM. Students whose interests deviate from STEM are forced to take science prerequisites that cater to the lab they have to join, not the one they want to join.

While it is necessary for the school to support the needs of students passionate about scientific research, it is equally as essential for it to nurture those students who are excited by the sciences, but want to apply their research skills to the humanities. A humanities research lab would enrich and challenge students who are considering a

humanities major in college, and take into account STEM-focused students seeking a slightly different career path.

Further, the school already offers multiple humanities classes—some are even graduation requirements. A research lab could be a natural progression for students that take multiple years of humanities classes. Journalism and Photojournalism classes could be prerequisites for a Media and Publications Lab; multiple years of a foreign language could lead to a Language Research Lab. The labs would not be requirements for all students; rather, they would serve the needs of students equally as interested in research, but along a unique track. Most importantly, they would create

a more holistic laboratory experience at Jefferson—one that doesn't discount the humanities in a STEM-centered school.

The Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Portrait of a Graduate outlines key character traits essential for student success beyond high school. The very first trait outlined in the list is communication—using effective reading and writing skills to convey a sense of understanding. The importance of humanities research regardless of STEM focus cannot be understated. A humanities research lab would not only aid current Jefferson students by diversifying the school's learning experience—it would also communicate clearly the inextricably linked nature of the humanities and sciences.