Connection

Text bridges gulf between scientists and laymen

Astartling confession opens the new science textbook co-authored by Art Wiggins of Oakland Community College and Charlie Wynn, now at Eastern Conjecticut State College.

Both of us hold bachelor's degrees in engineering. Yet both of us will admit that during our scheoling, as a result of the specialized studies required by our majors, we did not achieve a fundamental understanding of science."

of science."
Wiggins, known as "the Pied Piper of
Physics" because of his popularity at
OCC's Orchard Ridge campus, said the
new book is aimed at the fundamental
problem. "Natural Science: Bridging
the Gaps" is scheduled to be introduced
this semester at OCC.

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The breezy, witty Wiggins recently discussed his attention-getting approach to science in an interview in his office at OCC.

office at OCC.

It's a story of how engineers can become generalists — even philosophers—
and write an intellectually worthy science text for non-scientists.



ices. (Photo by Randy Borst)

"MOST TEXT books are 'pure,"
Wiggins began, meaning that they build a box around a single subject.
"What was lacking was a framework to hange a larger world view on. It's almost corny now to talk of the age of specialization. Anybody who has a Ph.D. gets narrow and specialized." Scientists, he explained, tend to be "categorical" thinkers. They take things apart, classify them into pieconholes. They write books the same way. The trouble is that non-scientists don't think that way.
"Non-scientists see connections. People who are not scientists like to see

specialization. Anyboody who has a proper special property of the first property of the

THE TALE of now Wiggins became an engineer and then a philosopher is like the story of modern America itself. "I graduated from high school (St. Joseph, South Bend) in 1956 and from college (Notre Dame) in 1950. Sputnik was 1957, 'said Wiggins, referring to the first space satellite. "Suddenly everyone said 'Gosh

the first space satellite.

"Suddenly, everyone said, 'Gosh, we're behind. We gotta get scientists and engineers: And the National Merit Scholarship program came along."

At Notre Dame, Wiggins took a double-degree program — #math and science — but the day came when he had to make a choice:

to make a choice:

"I chose engineering. There were

jobs."
His first job (1960-64) was as an aerophysicist for Bendix Systems Division in Ann Arbor. The next (1964-68) was in flight dynamics at Conductron Corp., also in Ann Arbor, where he still lives

The change came as he earned a

master's degree and worked toward a doctorate in physics at the University of Michigan.

"What I liked about the job was the people. I found I was scholastically in-clined, and decided to get into educa-tion.

"I jumped in with both feet."

Scientists tend to be categorical thinkers. They take things apart, classify them into pigeonholes. They write books the same way. The trouble is that non-scientists don't think that way. Non-scientists see connections. People who are not scientists like to see patterns. — Art Wiggins,

author and physicist

ulty member in 1978 and was emcee when the college made a Channel 55 television presentation. Last spring, he and four other OCC persons presented a Steve Allen-type anael discussion called 'Meetling of the Educators.' Wiggins portrayed Jean Piaget, the late Swiss psychologist who did landmark work on the stages of children's mental development. It meant mastering Piaget's thoughts and working them into a conversational script.

"If you're an active thinker, your scope must increase. You have a growing edge. You either create a new specialty, or you become broader."

A mind-broadening influence was Joe Hill. Dr. Joseph E. Hill, the educational theorist, was president of OCC until his death in 1977.

He didn't like to be called Dr. Hill. 'Call me Joe or I'll come around this table and kick your ass," he told them at hunch one dat hunch one data thunch one da at lunch one day

One of Hill's ideas was a program of "foundational studies," an idea far richer than the old "survey course,"

Wiggins said:
"The survey course was an introduction to Topic X. Joe's idea was to take key ideas and analyze them, not start

at square one and give them an intro-duction."

That is the theoretical underpinning for Wynn's and Wiggins' "Natural Science: Bridging the Gaps." It places science in the context of all human knowl-

edge.
THE "GAPS" in the title refers to gaps between scientists and non-scientist, between hard science and the

"Our unifying element was the scien-tific method," said Wiggins.



Art Wiggins, physicist and au-



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