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Linda Gregerson read a collection of passages from her book "The Scale of Habitation: The Body, the Cell, the City," at the Aline Wilmot Skaggs Biology building on Thursday night.

Scholars discuss other dimensions

Symposium combines literature, science

By: Edgar Zuniga Jr.

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If water droplets on a shower curtain could think, they would perceive two dimensions, even though bathrooms are three-dimensional.

Likewise, humans' experiencing three dimensions does not mean there couldn't be four or five dimensions, said Lisa Randall, a renowned Harvard physicist.

The idea of additional dimensions was one of the concepts Randall and other experts discussed during the U's science and literature symposium last weekend titled "Measuring Scale: A World in a Grain of Sand."

Hundreds of students and community members gathered at the U for the fourth annual science and literature symposium. This year's symposium featured renowned scholars Linda Gregerson, a poet, and Sanford Kwinter, a philosopher and architect. The symposium also included a number of panels, and former Sen. Jake Garn gave a talk about his life-changing visit to space.

"(The symposium) draws interesting parallels between science and literature and uses a scientific basis to understand more human truths," said Matthew Nye, a first-year graduate student in architecture.

The weekend began with Gregerson's reading from her own poetry, which combines literature with science and with poems focusing on magnetism, scientific truth and human truth, among other topics. Gregerson said oftentimes people see truth as something on a scale that is greater or beyond the human scale.

"It is difficult for the human imagination to take in truths that it hasn't somehow translated to human scale," Gregerson said in her lecture. "Our relationship (to the scale of truth) is what we sometimes call understanding."

In his talk, Garn recounted a space experience when many astronauts were drinking a floating mass of lemonade with straws. Garn said the entire world would benefit if more people could experience seeing the world from such a distance where the Earth seems small in scale to the universe. Such a perspective could foster more peace among people on Earth, he said.

The notion that there could be more than three dimensions impressed Abhijit Mondal, a first-year graduate student in mechanical engineering.

"The idea of multiple dimensions is abstract, but the way the idea was presented made it simplified and easier to understand," Mondal said.

The idea that the world is always changing because humans' perspectives of it change was one of the ideas discussed throughout the symposium. A person can observe events and try to understand events from up close and at the same time try to understand human truths that seem beyond the human scope, Gregerson said.

Randall said that people change their perspective of scale depending on their needs. If a person is traveling in a relatively smaller area, then that person needs a detailed map with street names. On the other hand, if someone is traveling cross-country, detailed streets are cumbersome, and people want information on the highway system.

"I felt like I have been in lecture halls with professors learning about decidedly interesting things to wrap your mind around," said Tim Anderton, a senior in math and physics.

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