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# 48: The UTC graduate engineers: Humanists and technologists!

What makes UTC graduates so special? They have successfully completed the general engineering courses and have all chosen a "major" specialization, as of their 3rd academic year of studies. Up to that point, their curriculum was, in most respects, quite "traditional". But the little extra flavour in their training probably lies in the important role of social sciences and humanities at UTC. With its specific Department and research laboratory devoted to social sciences, the University intends to train engineers with a difference …

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## Summary

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*At UTC, our pedagogical intention is not to turn out rough-shod technologists but rather humanist-oriented technologists capable of thinking through technology-intensive problems and situations including the environmental, social and societal consequences, constantly keeping innovation in their sights",* wrote Etienne Arnoult, UTC's Director for Training and Pedagogy, in the columns of the publication *Eduniversel* ranking the French engineering "grandes écoles". And indeed, UTC emphasizes and encourages the student-engineers to register for social studies and humanities early in the cursus programme.

In order to fully understand the important role assigned to social sciences and humanities at UTC, our readers must go back in time to 1972, the year this engineering school was founded by Guy Deniélou, and its first President, who signed - in the columns of the Revue de l'information de l'Oise – an article we can readily view as a manifesto for the UTC project. *"We shall endeavour to end once and for all the absurd cleavage between the humanities and science. […] Everybody in charge of designing, building, operating maintaining and repairing equipment know how much their activities depend on human interpersonal relationships, […] and the time is nigh when it will no longer be possible to pretend that we know someone without knowing the things he makes. […]. In the light of this, it is my feeling that a new approach to humanities becomes possible from a technological standpoint and we would like to implement this experiment".*

We can note that from the outset, UTC offered courses in philosophy, in marketing … In 1986, the Department UTC-THS (Technology and Social Sciences) was set up for the purpose of better organizing the university's programme offer in social sciences. A little later, in 1993, UTC founded the Costech Laboratory where we find several dozen lecturer-cum-research scientists and PhD students all specialist in social sciences and humanities.

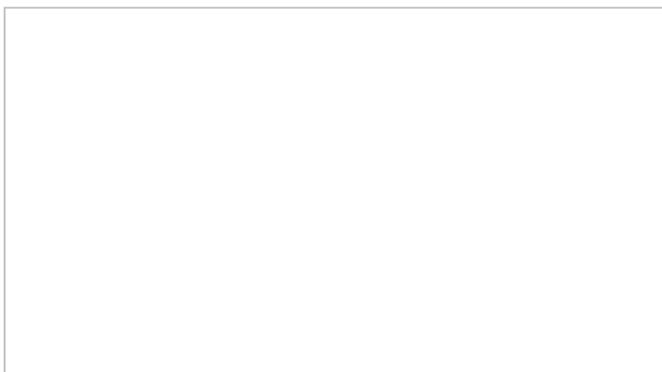Today we see that with over one hundred courses in areas such as: epistemology, philosophy of

engineering, language and communication studies, the social sciences represent à major fraction of the curriculum proposed to future UTC graduates. Indeed, these courses, more than just being introductions or primers or general culture-oriented, taken together, account for one quarter of the lecture hours followed by the student-engineers. *"Our aim"*, says Nathalie Darène, Director of UTC-THS (*cf.* interview page 6),*" is to train future engineers to take into account, on a day-to-day basis, all the socio-technical challenges and issues and the technology-intensive systems on which they can exert their talents".*

This project, viz., to train humanist technologists, saw its hey-day in 20123 when the university authorities launched a new "Hutech" curriculum (Humanities and Technology). The programme is open to candidates with a French Baccalaureate, S, ES or L and proposes a three year alternative to the classic UTC core programme, with some 50% scientific and technological courses and 50% social sciences and humanities in the first year at UTC. *"Our wish and objective is to train engineers capable of modelling these social challenges and issues on the same level as they do for scientific and technological questions, even before the technological projects come to be: we are no longer in a position to reason in terms of consequences (remedial), we must also reason "meaningful for Humanity", "societal projects",* details Nicolas Salzmann, head of the Hutech programme *(cf.* interview page 7 and the photo-report, page 8).

It turned out to be a "winner" for the first UTC classes graduating under the Hutech scheme. "*By spot lighting the THS option, UTC is already turning out engineers who integrate and give thought to the Intercations between Mankind and Technologies",* adds France, one of the recent Hutech graduates. "Hutech takes us further, exposes us to concepts and notions that later will become real tools to enable us to think of this Mankind/technology relationship in en entrepreneurial framework or in the products/service sectors.
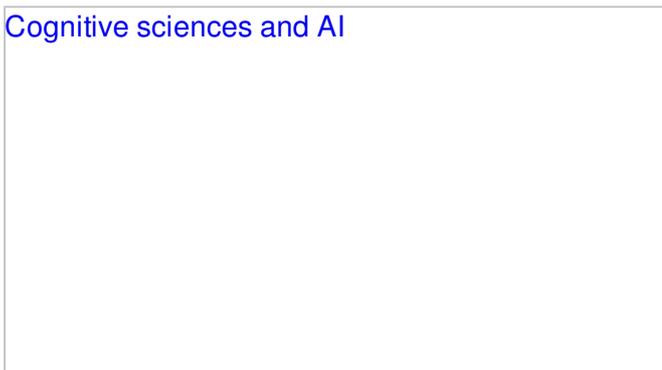
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