Ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies of interdisciplinary studies

Objective

After completing the course, the PhD student will be able to:

- Reflect on the origins, role and function of academic disciplines;
- Critically examine the similarities and differences between disciplinary, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and postdisciplinary studies;
- Account for different interdisciplinary ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies;
- Problematize research policy contexts for interdisciplinary studies;
- Critically reflect upon and situate his/her PhD work in relation to various interdisciplinary research environments.

Course content

The course offers a critical introduction to the history, philosophy, sociology and practice of interdisciplinary studies. Interdisciplinarity is considered in historical contexts and in relation to traditional academic disciplines. We discuss how disciplinary norms and epistemic models organize academic research, and to what extent and how are they challenged by interdisciplinary approaches. The course also addresses ontological assumptions upon which different interdisciplinary traditions rest and that they project, and examines interdisciplinarity as a particular type of cognition. We focus on interdisciplinary interpretations of truth and objectivity, address issues of communicative rationality and social studies of science and technology. The course proceeds to compare different kinds and forms of interdisciplinary research, its relational dynamics, and methodological premises. We critically analyze differences in interdisciplinary collaborations between the humanities, social sciences, hard and natural sciences, etc. The course also tackles the relations between interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, postdisciplinarity and antidisciplinarity both within and outside the Western-centric knowledge production paradigm. Finally, we touch upon the research policy milieus for interdisciplinary studies and possible career paths for interdisciplinary researchers.

Course organization and examination

The course is divided into two modules (3+2 credits). The first course module (3 credits) is offered to all doctoral students at the Department of Thematic Studies. The module is organized around lectures and seminars and strives to foster a joint interdisciplinary reflection across the Tema Department’s units. Prior to each class, the PhD student is expected to read the assigned literature. For the seminars the students are expected to prepare a set of questions to be addressed in the discussion and to formulate what they agree and disagree with in the discussed works. Active participation in all classes is required to pass course module one. Absence from a lecture or a seminar should be announced in advance, and can be compensated through a written reflection on the assigned literature (approx. 2 pages).

The second course module (2 credits) is developed by each Tema and aims to explore how interdisciplinary is interpreted and practiced in specific research environments. For this course module the student is asked to write a paper in which s/he critically reflects upon and situates his/her own PhD work in the field of interdisciplinary studies. The paper will be examined and
critically commented on by peer reviewers selected from other students. This paper forms the basis for the course examination in the second course module. The course grades are pass or fail. The student will receive his/her grade when both course modules are completed.

Course overview: Module 1
Thursday, 9/1
10-12, lecture

Venue:
Genealogy of modern disciplines and disciplinary culture: a critical overview
Madina Tlostanova, Tema G

Literature:

Additional literature:
Kuhn, Thomas. 1962. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (dropbox)

Thursday, 9/1
13-15, lecture

Venue:
Interdisciplinarity as a type of cognition. Realism, constructivism and beyond. The main types and forms of interdisciplinary research. Relational structures in interdisciplinarity (critique, borrowing, synthesis). The humanities/sciences divide?
Madina Tlostanova, Tema G

Literature:


Additional literature:

16/1, Thursday
Questioning truth, objectivity and (post)disciplinarity. Reading together Humberto Maturana and Donna J. Haraway.
Seminar
**Venue:**
Madina Tlostanova, Tema G

**Literature:**

23/1, Thursday
13-15, seminar
**Venue:**
How disciplined is disciplinary research?
David Bastviken, Tema M

This seminar will focus on the fundamental driving forces behind research and relate those to concepts of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, and to research in the everyday “down-to-Earth” practice.

Preparation: On the basis of the previously read literature and other experiences of research - think deeply about what drives the direction of the research carried out in disciplinary and interdisciplinary environments, respectively. Bring at least one specific example of differences and one specific example of similarities between these types of environments. Also think about what inspires successful research and formulation of research questions and bring such examples too. The thoughts and the examples brought to the seminar will be the foundation of the seminar.

28/1, Tuesday
13-15, lecture/seminar
**Venue:**
Interdisciplinarity and the assessment of research - a look at the valuation practices.

The session focuses on the settings and practices where research is assessed. The operating question is: How does interdisciplinary research fare in different settings and practices of evaluation?

Asta Cekaite, Tema B

Literature:


6/2, Tuesday
13-15, lecture/seminar

Venue:

From interdisciplinarity to transdisciplinarity – addressing social problems in collaboration with non-academic actors

Transdisciplinary research which transgresses disciplinary boundaries through problem-orientation and collaboration with non-academic actors is often seen as an important variety of interdisciplinarity. In this session we will critically discuss the ideas, practices and problems underlying this kind of research.

Harald Rohracher, Tema T

Literature:


Additional literature:


13/2, Wednesday
13-15, Seminar

Venue:

20/2, Thursday
13-15, Seminar

Venue:
Madina Tlostanova, Tema G

Interdisciplinary case studies

In preparation for the seminar reflect on a specific case study of a complex problem which can be approached from disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives. Analyze advantages and disadvantages of these approaches, methods and optics, and present your findings and ideas in class. Each of the participants will be given 20 minutes for their presentation and the following discussion.

Literature


"Design, sustainability and the urmadic university"
https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/futuretense/design-sustainability-and-the-urmadic-university/2928402

http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/fish.html


Additional literature:


Reference literature


Frodeman et al. (eds.). The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity, Oxford University Press, Oxford.


Manchester University Press.


