Ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies of interdisciplinary studies

Module 1 - 5 credits

Module 2 – 2,5 credits

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.

Module 1

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 milieu for interdisciplinary studies and possible career paths for interdisciplinary researchers.

Course organization and examination

The course is divided into two modules (5+2,5 credits). The first course module (5 credits) is offered to all doctoral students at the Department of Thematic Studies. It 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. 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).

For the last class the students prepare a presentation in which they apply some ideas and methods acquired during the course to their specific PhD project or reflect on a particular case study of a
complex problem from an interdisciplinary perspective. After discussion and peer reviewing by other students these presentations are transformed into course papers. The course paper should be 5 pages (12 times new roman, single spaced) including bibliography and footnotes. It must be submitted within two weeks upon the module completion. The papers will be graded according to Bologna system.

The second course module (2.5 credits) is developed by each Tema and aims to explore how interdisciplinary is interpreted and practiced in specific research environments. 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: Delfi

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: Delfi

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:


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

Additional literature:

Manchester University Press. (dropbox)

Press(dropbox)

16/1, Thursday
13.00-15-00, Seminar

Questioning truth, objectivity and (post)disciplinarity. Reading together Humberto Maturana and  
Donna J. Haraway.

Seminar

**Venue:** Delfi

**Literature:**


pages) (dropbox)

23/1, Thursday
13-15, seminar

**Venue:** Delfi

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.
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:


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: Delfi
Madina Tlostanova, Tema G


20/2, Thursday
13-15, Seminar
Venue: Delfi
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.

The deadline for the submission of course papers is March 5, 2020.

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


Reference literature


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


