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Introduction to Interdisciplinarity

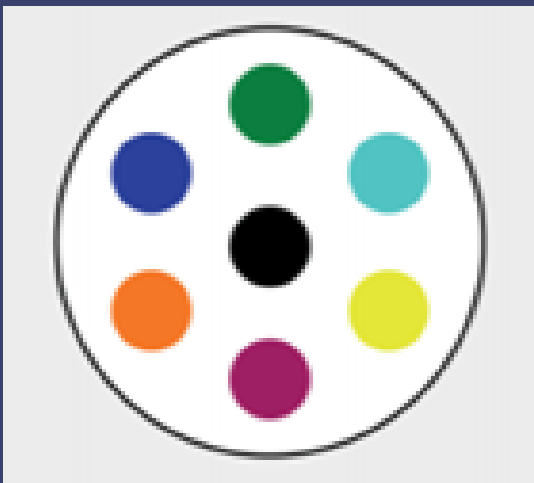
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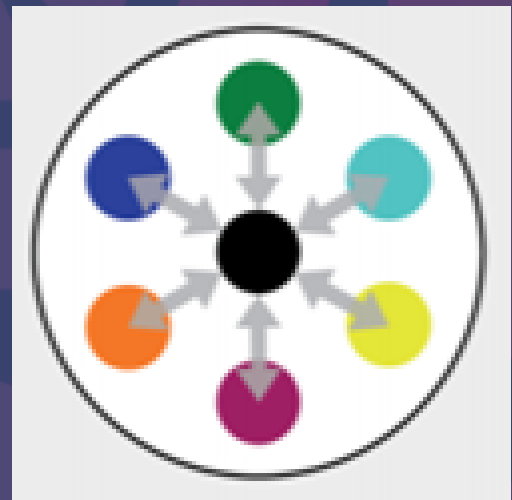
What is interdisciplinarity?

“Multidisciplinary” and “interdisciplinarity” are contested concepts. They are often described in the following terms:



In a multidisciplinary context, disciplines coexist. They seldom interact, and there is limited integration of methods, knowledge, and experiences. Each discipline retains its distinctive identity and is relatively unaffected by its engagement with other disciplines.

In interdisciplinary settings, there is more **integration**. Knowledge, methods, and skills from one discipline are integrated into other disciplines. Novel connections, and even new disciplines, can form.



Why interdisciplinarity?

There is nothing wrong with staying in a single discipline. This might be the most effective use of your skills, and you might produce exceptional research.

Nevertheless, there are several benefits to interdisciplinarity:

- As researchers, we learn to look around our corner and discover our blind spots.
- We learn that **our assumptions are contestable**, and we find gaps in our knowledge that other researchers can sometimes fill.
- We encounter **new and varied ways of approaching a single issue**, which can make us more nuanced, and less reductive, in our thinking.
- Exposure to difference teaches us **humility**.
- We learn to **embrace the uncertainty** of not knowing certain topics, and the more we encounter alternative research traditions, the more effective, and considerate, we become when giving and receiving feedback.

We also learn that **we have something valuable to contribute**; that we can complement other disciplines and advance important debates. We are not merely one piece in a puzzle.

Interdisciplinary exchanges generate entirely new pieces and puzzles, new games and rules, new metaphors and ways of thinking. They are dynamic spaces. We change others and are changed by them. We make disciplines more receptive to change, less likely to stagnate, and more dynamic in the face of contemporary issues.

Interdisciplinarity can liberate. We can experiment with ideas and are free to meander from one discipline to the next: our curiosity is allowed to wander. Disciplines open up to us that once seemed distant or impenetrable. We see how poets, philosophers, and physicists view the world, and fuse our horizon with theirs. Sometimes we can bring more of our interests into interdisciplinary research, which can humanise learning.

Passion projects often produce the most exciting research projects.

What is the value of speaking to an interdisciplinary panel?

Presenting our research to interdisciplinary panels is challenging and rewarding.



Different vernaculars, background assumptions, and methodologies are brought together, and we run the risk of talking past each other.

Communicating effectively often requires us to question the universality of our words and assumptions, and to use accessible language and relatable metaphors. Over time, it becomes easier to unpack our concepts and communicate in language that non-specialist audiences can understand.

The more we practice interdisciplinary communication, the better we get at tailoring our research, and conveying our value, to different research cultures.

As interdisciplinary audience members, we also gain a better sense of the value of other disciplines, which can help us position our research within the landscape of academia.

Many interdisciplinary spaces, including ICUR, have international audiences. Often we find, during conversations with others, that certain phrases are culturally specific. Trying to explain ourselves without overreliance on local colloquialisms (or academic jargon) can improve our communication skills and increase the global outreach of our research.

In an interdisciplinary setting, **everyone is learning** and everyone has to sit with **uncertainty**. Spaces like ICUR are wonderful places to come together, develop critical and communication skills, and learn something new – about research and about yourself.

Interdisciplinary Experiences at ICUR

Get the most out of your ICUR experience by engaging with research across disciplines.

Before the conference...

- ☐ Find one presentation in the programme using a **similar methodology** to yours - but for a different topic.
- ☐ Find one presentation in the programme with the **same research purpose** (Create? Improve? Understand?) as you – in a different field.
- ☐ Find one presentation which is outside your own discipline, but about which you'd like to know more – and think of a question for the presenter.

During the conference...

- ☐ Attend a panel on a topic which interests you but in which **none of the presenters are researchers in your own discipline**.
- ☐ Ask a presenter from **another institution AND in another discipline** a question in their Q&A.
- ☐ Find a poster presenter who shares a research interest with you and ask them about their project.
- ☐ Explain your research project to someone who shares your interest in the topic but who is not in your field of study.
- ☐ Think of one way in which your research project could connect with another presentation at ICUR – and consider reaching out!

After the conference...

- ☐ Reflect on the questions you received at the conference and your interactions with non-specialists in your field. What did you learn?
- ☐ Connect with one presenter or audience member you met at ICUR and who shared an area of interest with you.
- ☐ Talk about your research project to a non-specialist - maybe even outside of academia! How has the way you communicate your project changed?