182. Linking Interdisciplinarity, Innovation and Impact: Both Within and Outside the Academy

10:30 to 12:00 pm

Crowne Plaza: Rockefeller

Interdisciplinarity is often touted as the best means of linking academic knowledge production with societal problems and needs. Interdisciplinarity, in other words, is seen as a way of guaranteeing the societal relevance of academic knowledge. The connection between knowledge production and use, however, is fraught with conceptual, practical and institutional difficulties: is not the academy part of - rather than far removed from - society? If so, why suppose that disciplinary knowledge production is any less relevant to societal problem-solving than interdisciplinary work? What about the academic reward structure? Even if interdisciplinarity could be shown to increase the societal impact of academic knowledge, unless academics are rewarded rather than punished for interdisciplinarity, why suppose that they will engage in interdisciplinary work? Can interdisciplinarity be shown to increase societal impacts? If so, how? What is the state of the art in measuring interdisciplinarity? What about measuring impact? Is there any way these measurements can be combined?

Participants:

The Conflict of the Faculties 2.0: Outside the Disciplines, Who Counts as a Peer? *James Britt Holbrook, University of North Texas*

In his essay, "The Conflict of the Faculties," Immanuel Kant not only offers a critique of the dispute between the higher and lower university faculties, but also he lays out the basic plan for the German (and later North American) research university that was instantiated by Wilhelm von Humboldt with the establishment of the University of Berlin. A high degree of autonomy - both between academic disciplines and between the university and society - was built into the structure of this new research university. Once this new model of the university began to take hold, disciplinary professional societies began to spring up, as well. What it means to be a peer - to be a "philosopher" as opposed to a "psychologist," say - became institutionalized with departments on the intra-university level and professional societies and journals on the inter-university level. By the late 20th century, however, calls for interdisciplinarity could be heard across the academy. It is far from clear, however, that we yet know (around 50 years after the beginnings of the sustained call for interdisciplinarity) how to engage in interdisciplinary work, or even why we ought to do so. I argue that a major reason behind this confusion is the lack of institutional change to accommodate interdisciplinarity. As a case study in this failure to change I examine the notion of a peer.

How Rankings Can Suppress Interdisciplinarity: The Case of Innovation Studies and Business and Management. *Ismael Rafols, University of Sussex*; *Loet Leydesdorff, University of Amsterdam*; *Andrew Stirling, Sussex*

Rankings have undeniably captured the attention of many scientists and policymakers. Academic managers are busily crafting strategies to improve the position of their institutions in the rankings. Incentives for faculty to publish in high-rank journals figures prominently among the policies developed. What can be the unintended effects of a shift in publication strategies aimed at ranking improvement? This study illustrates how alleged "excellence-based" journal rankings have a bias in favor of mono-disciplinary research and how this negatively affects the assessment of interdisciplinary organizations. The investigation first demonstrates that Innovation Studies (IS) organizations are more interdisciplinary than leading Business and Management Schools (BMS) under various perspectives. Second, it shows that the journal rankings of the Association of Business Schools (ABS) have a disciplinary bias which translates very directly into a low assessment of interdisciplinary organizations' (IS) performance in comparison to BMS. Finally, it shows that this low assessment is not warranted by citation-count measures. In this way, the present study suggests that the use of ABS rankings serves systematically to disadvantage interdisciplinarity. While the use of rankings is predicated on the assumption that the resulting ranks constitute objective assessments that can be treated as robust proxies for academic excellence, these results challenge such claims to objectivity and suggest that rankings present a "specific" view of excellence. To the extent that ABS rankings are becoming increasingly used to evaluate individual and organizational research performance, it does seem likely that they have a suppressive effect on interdisciplinary research.

Beware the Language of Impact. *Adam Robert Briggle, University of North Texas*

In a neoliberal age obsessed with returns on investment, it goes without saying that having an "impact" is a good thing. In the world of bioethics advisory commissions, the language of impact usually means a demonstrable short-term influence on a specific piece of legislation. To publish a report that has no such impact is to be perceived as a failure, as being irrelevant to the real business of filling the policy vacuums created by innovation. The language of impact here is instrumentalist: it does not matter whether it was a good policy beneficially shaped by the report, but merely that it was impacted in some way. This is to conceive of the task of such commissions far too narrowly. Their task is to pose the question: what goals ought we to pursue and why? This re-examination of ends may paralyze action momentarily and thus does not lend itself well to metrics of "impact." Even where, as in the Belmont Report, we can show a demonstrable short-term impact, what makes this a success is not the mere fact that it shaped policy but that it shaped it in the right direction according to noble and well-justified principles. But here, the principles in question were already largely shared. The task for such commissions in a pluralist society facing new biotechnological powers is not just to articulate shared values but to unearth different visions of the good life and subject them to critical analysis. This examination of ends will not provide immediately available means for impacting a policy. But we must first know what kind of impact is good. According to the current obsession with impact, we could walk right into a bio-dystopia, all the while congratulating ourselves for "impacting" the policies that got us there.

Interdisciplinary Thinking and Academic Rigor. *Robert Frodeman, University of North Texas*

For the past 125 years the university has been the home of knowledge production. The 20th century research university combined a Kantian belief in disciplinarity, a Humboldtian commitment to linking research and education and upholding academic autonomy, and a Cartesian allegiance to infinite knowledge production. There was no end to knowledge - either in the sense of a conclusion, or in terms of there being a goal - other than the endless goal of the infinite pursuit of desire. This has led to a tacit, academy-wide definition of academic rigor. This view sees rigor as an infinite process. In addition to being tacit, this definition is also unsustainable. Rigor pursued with no formal attention to other formal determinants such as timeliness, accessibility or cost ignores the social determinants to knowledge, factors that are always implicitly in play. The academy needs to revise its current sense of rigor, away from its current monolithic, disciplinary model of specialization and expertise.

Chair:

James Britt Holbrook, University of North Texas

Discussants:

Steve Fuller, University of Warwick

Edward Hackett, Arizona State University