



Interdisciplinarity: Its Role in a Discipline-based Academy

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At the turn of the twentieth century, colleges and universities in the U.S. and elsewhere were convulsed with change, a change induced by the creation of the modern set of academic disciplines. Their emergence at that time fundamentally altered how universities were constructed and how they did their business. It is the model on which the academy of the twenty-first century operates. Very shortly after the creation of the disciplinary-based academy, pressures began to build, both in the academy and in the society that looked to the academy to help solve pressing social problems, to develop interdisciplinary approaches to address problems that fit poorly within the disciplinary structure. These external and internal forces never fully abated, and peaked after the Second World War. They have peaked again more recently, and the contemporary college and university is therefore a rich amalgam of disciplinary and interdisciplinary units, problems, approaches, and structures. *Interdisciplinarity* examines the contemporary academy by connecting its disciplinary-based structure with its burgeoning interdisciplinary focus. Part I looks at the value of the disciplinary structure in the contemporary university alongside the motivations that lead to calls for greater interdisciplinary approaches. Part 2 traces the development of external forces, particularly the private and public foundation, that shaped the development of interdisciplinary scholarship in the twentieth century. The final two sections examine in detail interdisciplinary education and the organization of university-based interdisciplinary research.

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