

## Workshop series: The Place of the Cognitive in Literary Studies (2018–2019)

RESEARCH POLICY BRIEF ON THE PRACTICAL CHALLENGES OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

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Interdisciplinarity is routinely recommended and sometimes even demanded in today's academia. It appears to be widely recognized that collaborations between different disciplines are necessary to tackle the most intractable practical problems humanity is faced with and to generate new, paradigm-shifting ideas in basic research.

However, it has become equally clear that the structures of the academia do not, in fact, support interdisciplinary work, and embarking on such cooperation can often come at a not insignificant cost to the career prospects of the individual scholar.

This policy brief addresses the most immediate practical, structural and institutional problems on work across disciplines, based on the experience of early career scholars from the Nordic countries who work on literature in an interdisciplinary fashion and who were brought together by the NOS-HS workshop series. It outlines the problems and offers concrete suggestions on how interdisciplinary research can be made to work and how its full potential for ground-breaking ideas and new knowledge can be realised.

### WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF INTERDISCIPLINARY COOPERATION?

#### HOW CAN INTERDISCIPLINARITY WORK IN TODAY'S ACADEMIA?

- (1) Interdisciplinary work requires extra time in the notoriously time-poor environment of academia:
  - a. to familiarise oneself with the other field of research and to navigate conceptual differences with new colleagues
  - b. to develop collaborations and to carry them through
  - c. to negotiate administrative issues between different departments and institutions.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS: *Genuine interdisciplinary projects could be granted extra benefits (time /funding) or reliefs from producing deliverables on the same schedules of efficiency as discipline-based work. Administration should become more flexible to accommodate cooperation.*

- (2) For early career scholars, publications from interdisciplinary work do not carry the same rewards as discipline-based publications:
  - a. they are difficult to get published in leading journals that focus on a particular discipline
  - b. they are published in different journals than the discipline-internal debates and are often not read by colleagues
  - c. they are often co-authored and valued less within traditional humanities disciplines.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS: *Journals should develop review structures that cater for interdisciplinary work. Indicators of academic values in publication counts should include multi-author work.*

- (3) Academic institutions are still structured in such a way as to discourage interdisciplinary careers:
  - a. positions are profiled for a specific department, making it near impossible for interdisciplinary scholars to compete for tenured positions
  - b. funding bodies assign interdisciplinary project proposals to evaluation panels on a single subject, making it difficult to recognise and reward the specifically interdisciplinary qualities of the project.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS: *Create more interdisciplinary degree programmes and accept more fluidity in the teaching duties of individual scholars, e.g. by having them teach not in one, but in different degree programmes. In making funding decisions, there should be dedicated panels for interdisciplinary work, where the members do not just come from different disciplines, but instead have done interdisciplinary work themselves. Only such scholars are qualified to recognise and appreciate the time-intensive and exploratory nature of research that does not fit established paradigms.*