CAS and the Social Sciences/Humanities Seminar
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Critical review of the formation of disciplines

Discipline is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a branch of learning or scholarly instruction."

Fields of study as defined by academic discipline provide the framework for a student's program of study, and as such, define the academic world inhabited by scholars.

Training in a discipline results in a system of orderly behavior recognized as characteristic of the discipline. Such behaviors are manifested in scholars' approaches to understanding and investigating new knowledge, ways of working, and perspectives on the world around them.

Disciplinary fields provide the structure of knowledge in which faculty members are trained and socialized; carry out tasks of teaching, research, and administration; and produce research and educational output.

The university culture developed differently in northern Europe than it did in the south, although the northern (primarily Germany, France and Great Britain) and southern universities (primarily Italy) did have many elements in common.

- Latin was the language of the university, used for all texts, lectures, disputations and examinations.
- Professors lectured on the books of Aristotle for logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics
- Hippocrates, Galen, Avicenna and Arabic scholars were used for medicine.
- Outside of these commonalities, great differences separated north and south, primarily in subject matter. Italian universities focused on **law and medicine**, while the northern universities focused on the **arts and theology**.
- The structure of Northern Universities tended to be modeled after the system of faculty governance developed at the University of Paris. The University of Paris in 1231 consisted of four faculties: Theology, Medicine, Canon Law and Arts.
- Southern universities tended to be patterned after the student-controlled model begun at the University of Bologna.

Early Modern universities initially continued the curriculum and research of the Middle Ages: **natural philosophy, logic, medicine, theology, mathematics, astronomy (and astrology), law, grammar and rhetoric.**

The importance of humanism for changing this state-of-affairs cannot be underestimated. Once humanist professors joined the university faculty, they began to transform the study of grammar and rhetoric. Humanist professors focused on the ability of students to write and speak with distinction, to translate and interpret classical texts, and to live honorable lives. Other scholars within the university were affected by the humanist approaches to

learning and their linguistic expertise in relation to ancient texts, as well as the ideology that advocated the ultimate importance of those texts.

Although the initial focus of the humanist scholars in the university was the discovery, exposition and insertion of ancient texts and languages into the university, and the ideas of those texts into society generally, their influence was ultimately quite progressive.

Examining the influence of humanism on scholars in medicine, mathematics, astronomy and physics may suggest that humanism and universities were a strong impetus for the scientific revolution**.**

Although the connection between humanism and scientific discovery may very well have begun within the confines of the university, the connection has been commonly perceived as having been severed by the changing nature of science during the scientific revolution (see CP Snow's *The Two Cultures*, 1959)**.**

Most academic disciplines have their roots in the mid- to late-19th century secularization of universities, when the traditional curricula were supplemented with non-classical languages and literatures, social sciences, natural science and technology disciplines. Many disciplines designed as preparation for careers and professions, such as nursing, hospitality management, and corrections, also emerged in the universities. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was an explosion of new disciplines focusing on specific themes, such as media studies, women's studies, and black studies. More recently, interdisciplinary "hybrid" fields such as biochemistry and geophysics gained prominence as their contribution to knowledge became widely recognized.

There is no consensus on how some academic disciplines should be classified, e.g., whether anthropology and linguistics are social sciences disciplines or humanities disciplines.

Thought Experiments

- Recognizing Diversity: three attractive fields of study
- Forming and Leading Teams: some practice (appendix A)
- Your Career: can you combine your interests?