**New Perspectives on the Disciplines: Comparative Studies in Higher Education |** April 28 & 29, 2006 **The CHCI Annual Meeting at the University of Chicago |** April 27-29, 2006

"The Fate of Disciplines" was at once the culmination of a three-year project on "New Perspectives on the Disciplines: Comparative Studies in Higher Education" and the conference for the annual meeting of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI).

The last several decades have seen a great deal of change across the disciplines. In the life sciences, changes in practices and concepts have, in many cases, resulted in some quite radical transformations, including the substitution of new disciplines for old. In the humanities and human sciences, where change has been less dramatic but nonetheless far-reaching, universities have tended to respond by addition rather than by transformation and substitution. These additions typically take the form of non-departmental units such as centers, workshops, and institutes. Often these units are called "interdisciplinary." The humanities institute movement might itself be seen as evidence of how the problem of disciplinary change has been addressed on the humanities side of the research university.

The era of interdisciplinarity, however, has had its problems. The proliferation of units in itself is a problem, both intellectually and administratively. Further, the rule of interdisciplinarity depends to a large degree on an ill-defined notion of what a discipline is in the first place. And insofar as it offers an idea of the disciplines, it tends to represent them as largely static and atomic, rather than in themselves comprising a dynamic system, a changing set of relationships. What might follow if the disciplines were conceived relationally, and disciplinary transformation a function of changed relationships? In such a case, might not universities wish to find appropriately flexible forms of disciplinary institutionalization, a course that did not commit them to the existing tendency to proliferate more and more new units?

Though this conference is not limited to these questions, they do constitute some of the intellectual motivation for undertaking it. The five panels of the conference offer as many chances to develop good answers to these questions. The first does so by attacking head-on the question of definition: what is a discipline? The second and third panels offer pairings of older and newer disciplines that stand in some significant relation to each other: Philology and Cinema-Media Studies; Religious Studies and Science Studies. We look at these disciplines in themselves and, by way of specially invited commentators, in relation to each other. The penultimate panel looks at the ensemble of disciplines in systematic terms. The final panel, by way of an art installation commissioned for the conference itself, takes up a question, more and more insistent in recent years, as to the relation of the disciplines and the practice of the fine arts.

[Poster](https://7f8f0045-e7dc-45d2-8707-e226a342c508.usrfiles.com/ugd/7f8f00_5d1d584e4b854500a6dfea2b94e6a521.pdf) for “The Fate of Disciplines”

[Published articles](https://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/past_issues/issue/summer_2009_v35_n4/) on “The Fate of Disciplines” in the journal *Critical Inquiry* (2009)