



Undisciplining Knowledge: Interdisciplinarity in the Twentieth Century

By Harvey J. Graff

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Interdisciplinarity—or the interrelationships among distinct fields, disciplines, or branches of knowledge in pursuit of new answers to pressing problems—is one of the most contested topics in higher education today. Some see it as a way to break down the silos of academic departments and foster creative interchange, while others view it as a destructive force that will diminish academic quality and destroy the university as we know it. In *Undisciplining Knowledge*, acclaimed scholar Harvey J. Graff presents readers with the first comparative and critical history of interdisciplinary initiatives in the modern university. Arranged chronologically, the book tells the engaging story of how various academic fields both embraced and fought off efforts to share knowledge with other scholars. It is a story of myths, exaggerations, and misunderstandings, on all sides.

Touching on a wide variety of disciplines—including genetic biology, sociology, the humanities, communications, social relations, operations research, cognitive science, materials science, nanotechnology, cultural studies, literacy studies, and biosciences—the book examines the ideals, theories, and practices of interdisciplinarity through comparative case studies. Graff interweaves this narrative with a social, institutional, and intellectual history of interdisciplinary efforts over the 140 years of the modern university, focusing on both its implementation and evolution while exploring substantial differences in definitions, goals, institutional locations, and modes of organization across different areas of focus.

Scholars across the disciplines, specialists in higher education, administrators, and interested readers will find the book’s multiple perspectives and practical advice on building and operating—and avoiding fallacies and errors—in interdisciplinary research and education invaluable.

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Editorial Review

Review

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(*Science Magazine*)

Graff's carefully argued book is much to be welcomed.

(*The Quarterly Review of Biology*)

I am fascinated by *Undisciplining Knowledge*. The most comprehensive and complicating examination of interdisciplinary study yet undertaken. Graff pushes on the boundaries of received wisdom.

(Mike Rose, author of *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us*)

In this fascinating set of historical case studies, Harvey Graff traces the ways many now-common fields of knowledge, such as biology, cognitive science, sociology, and nanotechnology, developed as the result of interdisciplinary exchanges. Graff's insights (and cautions) will be valuable to anyone involved in education or research interested in seeing current myths of "interdisciplinarity" exploded by serious scholarship.

(Johanna Drucker, University of California–Los Angeles, Visual and Bibliographic Studies)

Harvey Graff adds a valuable historical dimension to discussions of interdisciplinarity by comparing the complex and varied history of academic fields. His probing of less familiar terrain, such as cognitive science, literacy studies and operations research, will prompt fresh thinking about the value and limits of specific research programs. This volume is unique in advocating inclusive and respectful cross-field dialogue while also offering bracing criticism of particular historical examples of interdisciplinarity in practice.

(Jerry A. Jacobs, University of Pennsylvania, Department of Sociology, author of *In Defense of Disciplines: Interdisciplinarity and Specialization in the Research University*)

All academics and researchers are familiar with the concepts of disciplines and interdisciplinarity, but few would agree very precisely as to their meaning. Harvey Graff examines these ideas, and related concepts such as disciplinary clusters and discipline envy, from many perspectives - philosophical, historical and social - and explains how they have evolved, often in concert with the shifting structure of academia itself. Graff describes the use and abuse of discipline-interdiscipline jargon, the successes and failures of academic tribes seeking to use these concepts for their own advantage, and the impacts on scholarship, pedagogy and the modern educational experience. It is a fascinating and well-documented discussion of a set of conceptual

constructs that most of us think we understand, but probably do not.

(Michael Bevis, The Ohio State University, School of Earth Sciences)

From the Back Cover

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