

TO THE JUGULAR OF JARGON**INTERDISCIPLINARY**

In the last issue, we asked you to send us your definitions of the following three terms that are widely used in academia. The following two responses come from Dr Oliver Hulme ('space', 'interdisciplinary') and Louise Whiteley ('space', 'interdisciplinary', and 'discourse'):

SPACE

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By Dr Oliver Hulme

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Space is an abstract concept which denotes a structure consisting of one or multiple dimensions, in which all possible values or exemplars of a particular class exist. For example, face space contains all possible faces and arguably has tens of dimensions, or colour space which has 3.

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By Louise Whiteley

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A space is a region of some particular dimension. It can either cover the whole dimension or some portion of it. For example, in the dimension of physical extent, the universe is a space which covers the whole of the dimension. The two dimensional array of pixels on a TV screen is a smaller space defined in the same dimension. Other dimensions in which spaces are defined are number (e.g. the space of real numbers), colour (e.g. the space of all colours that can be made by mixing green and blue), and ideas (e.g. the space of liberal political ideas).

In more common usage, 'space' tends to refer to an *unoccupied region* of a space as defined in this way – for example, the gap between two buildings, or between two words in a sentence. Often implicit in this usage is the concept of the unoccupied region being 'big enough' for some particular task or endeavour – for example, whether there is enough space to park your car, or if you have enough space to make a decision.

By Dr Oliver Hulme

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An action, event or product, which is born out of interaction between disciplines, such that neither discipline could have born such a thing in isolation. the strongest form of interdisciplinarity, if there is such a word, I imagine to be a new application of combining the disciplines. For example, a neuroscience project using standard statistics packages isn't an interdisciplinary project crossing the boundaries between statistics and neuroscience, whereas a project which involve active collaboration with statisticians, developing novel statistics, or novel applications of statistics would be justified in being called interdisciplinary.

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By Louise Whiteley

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Describes something belonging to more than one discipline or area of knowledge. What is 'between disciplines' can be the methodology – using different techniques to understand the same topic, or it can be the combination of different domains of knowledge. However, a methodology or approach often defines the language and concepts with which the topic is described, meaning that there is not necessarily a clear boundary between the two. Because interdisciplinarity often evolves over time to become a new single discipline, it usually describes a novel combination of methodologies or ideas.

DISCOURSE

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By Louise Whiteley

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A discourse is a two-way exchange of information or opinions on a particular topic. It implies some degree of formality in the manner or context of the debate – either laid out in writing or formal

speeches, or belonging to a specialized sphere of debate such as ‘political’ or ‘scientific’ discourse which has particular rules about how discourse proceeds.

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