

Notes from Interdisciplinary Session #3
“Communicating Interdisciplinary Research: Connections Across Disciplines”
7th of May, 2025

A panel with contributions by **Professor Geertje Schuitema** of the UCD School of Business
and **Mr. Allen Higgins** of the UCD School of Business

Sessions planned and notes provided by **UCD Research Culture**

Learn more at <https://www.ucd.ie/researchculture/engagement/interdisciplinarity/>

I. WITHIN DISCIPLINES

Disciplinary Differences and Overlaps

- What *is* a discipline? How separate are we? Epistemological, ontological, etc. are all different...
- **Allen:** “It is difficult to disrupt your scientific or academic beliefs, and there are foundational divisions that you don’t need to smooth over.” Such as realism vs constructivism, positivism vs interpretivism; empiricism, phenomenology, idealism. We don’t necessarily share the same theories on human society, social reality, on organizations, populations, or even the agency of people as individuals.
- On the overlap:
 - **Allen:** “The overlapping part is found in our research methods.”
 - **Geertje:** “I believe curiosity, more so than methodology, is the common shared ground that we can “tack” our collaborations on. What is driving your research? Is it a specific research question, or a broader goal about impact?”
Example: Curiosity is found in numbers, and it can be very simple.
 - *70% of households in Ireland use well water. They’re responsible for testing their own water. But 95% of well users don’t test their own water.*
 - Learned to focus not on risk, but on **uncertainty** to change behavior.

Shared Lexicons

- Shared lexicons/language starts the process of mutual trust and dialogue. Don’t take for granted that people understand the word you’re using. Have no shame — ask!
 - **Geertje:** To develop a shared language, structure it into the collaboration — literally putting it on the agenda. It takes time and effort; come back to it over and over
 - **Allen:** There are specialised forms of communication that are more structured for listening. Teams of Teams, for example, as a specific strategy. Stand-up meetings. Lean-in meetings. Active listening. Expand our modes of expression starting with spoken and written discourse, use whiteboards, kinesthetic expression, models, I use Lego Serious Play (LSP) for facilitation.
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II. ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Relationships to Field, Self, and Other

- **Allen:** How teams work is typically interdisciplinary, because pure disciplinary teams are rare. You have the researchers... and then the audience/patient/client/customer, etc. From the audience’s perspective, when they interact or interface with a research team, they expect to see a single organisation, a **united front**. Business and organisations desire clear **value creation** — to put it with a utilitarian view. So, it’s

valuable to reflect: How are we as a university similar/different from other forms of organization? A university is not the same as a company.

Later stage academics may need to **reboot** or **bootstrap back** into the excitement of being part of a team.

- What re-engages a researcher in the later part of the life cycle?
- Target the proposal writing process — you're in a bigger project space, work with it!
- **Geertje:** Difference between **doing** interdisciplinary research and **being** an interdisciplinary researcher.
 - Are you an expert who collaborates? Or a jack of all trades? Value in either, but good to think on
- **Geertje:** It's also okay to have **single-disciplinary work**, especially if you're tackling big theoretical questions as a senior researcher — these can be applied by later scientists.

Academic Advancement and Interdisciplinarity

- **Geertje:** We need to **change institutional barriers** to rewarding interdisciplinary work — not just how we share it.
 - It's encouraged, but **not rewarded** — and that's really hard.

What to do, as an ECR?

- Be strategic. “Play the game and know the rules.”
- Start your proposal with journals in mind. Fuse those keywords into your work — increases likelihood of acceptance.
- **Geertje:** Changed strategy for mixed methods research — instead of trying to publish mixed methods papers across disciplines, one successful strategy is to split the qualitative and quantitative parts into separate, but linked, publications. The research is shared as a bundle in presentations, but published separately.
- **Allen:** At some level, yes, you may need to “Follow the money. Where is funding and how can we approach it with genuine expertise?”

Collaboration: Not Always Possible

- **Geertje:** “It's okay if the marriage has to end.” Not every project can find an overlap.
 - Example: “We need something with people or communication — let's add on someone from social sciences or arts.” Two issues with this set up
 1. pre-designed role with no input for the AHSS researcher means less creativity for them, and
 2. theory-driven (AHSS) vs impact-driven (STEM) tendencies, without fusing the two, will lead to more on-dimensional research.
 - Solution... STEM researchers need to recognize the **value of theory-driven work**, but AHSS needs to bring in **impact**... while STEM researchers need to trust AHSS experts on theory and development, bringing them onboard long before asking them to draft a simple “societal impact” section

III. BEYOND DISCIPLINES

Accessible Communication

- **Geertje:** “Explain it to your parents. Explain it to society. Focus on **impact**, involve the community.”
 - “Here’s what we did with the research you gave us.”
 - Write policy briefs, show how research fits into policy.
 - Return to curiosity.
- **Geertje** has released a recent documentary released on **science communication**, *100 Perceptions: Raw Materials* — Watch and learn more at <https://vectorproject.eu/100-perceptions-raw-materials/>

Social media

- **Geertje:** Prefers **targeted messages** on her own terms. “Platforms fade out — better to **take control** on your own terms for your own team.”
- **Colleen (Moderator):** Interesting how **social media is judged** as a more populist, less scientific form of communication.
- **Allen: Use social media, podcasts, YouTube** — if you’re curious, just try it!
 - **Allen** has a **podcast** — “It was awful at first, but improved over time!” — Listen at [Acast](#), on [Spotify](#), on [Apple Podcasts](#) and learn more at <https://www.designtalk.ie/>
 - Who is your audience? “Put your stuff out there, and they will find you.”
 - Could be social media, a streaming site, a web domain.
 - Focus on **your** specific audience and contacting **them**!

Public facing nature of universities

- **Allen:** Venn diagram with three circles: one discipline, another discipline, and then public/recipient/customer/community.
 - In the private sector, we’re private people.
In universities, we’re **public facing** — we’re obligated and honored to participate in the **public sphere**.
 - We already have a public presence — so we may as well learn to engage and present ourselves effectively.
- **Allen:** Six levels of complexity explanation = widely accepted communication tool.