

Academic disciplines: - Meaning and Nature

After understanding the meaning of discipline, let us understand the meaning of the word 'Academic discipline'. You have heard of different academic disciplines like science, humanities, arts etc. Recall your experiences with these disciplines and try to identify the meaning of academic disciplines.

The term 'academic discipline' certainly incorporates many elements of the meaning of 'discipline' discussed above, as school discipline. At the same time, it has also become a technical term for the organisation of learning and the systematic production of new knowledge. Often disciplines are identified with taught subjects, but clearly not every subject taught at university can be called a discipline. Discipline has many more attributes than the fact that something that is taught in an academic setting.

Characteristics of Academic Discipline

There is a list of criteria and characteristics, which indicate whether a subject is indeed a distinct discipline. They are as follows:

É Disciplines have a particular object of research (e.g. law, society, politics), though the object of research may be shared with another discipline;

É Disciplines have a body of accumulated specialist knowledge referring to their object of research, which is specific to them and not generally shared with another discipline;

É Disciplines have theories and concepts that can organise the accumulated specialist knowledge effectively;

É Disciplines use specific terminologies or a specific technical language adjusted to their research object;

É Disciplines have developed specific research methods according to their specific research requirements; and may be most crucially;

É Disciplines must have some institutional manifestation in the form of subjects taught at universities or colleges, respective academic departments and professional associations connected to it.

Generally, it can be said that the more of these criteria discipline can tick, the more likely it becomes that a certain field of academic enquiry is a recognised discipline capable of reproducing itself and building upon a growing body of own scholarship. If a discipline is called 'studies', then it usually indicates that it is of newer origin (women studies) and that it



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may fall short of one or more of the above mentioned characteristics. This would be typically lack of theorisation or lack of specific methodologies, which usually diminishes the status of a field of research. These studies can either aim at remaining undisciplined, as women studies did in the 1970s, or they can engage in the process of their disciplinarisation and institutionalisation. Thus, we can conclude that:

É Academic discipline is a branch of learning or scholarly investigation that provides a structure for the students (program of study,) especially in the graduate and post-graduate levels.

É Academic discipline is a field or branch of learning affiliated with an academic department of a university, formulated for the advancement of research and scholarship.

É Academic discipline is formulated for the professional training of researchers, academics and specialists.

É It is a branch of knowledge that is taught and researched as part of higher education. Examples for Academic Disciplines are Anthropology, Space Science, psychology, sociology, archaeology, Education etc.

É An academic discipline is a subdivision of knowledge that is taught and researched at the college or university level.

É It incorporates expertise, people, projects, communities, challenges, studies, inquiry, research areas, and facilities that are strongly associated with a given scholastic subject area or college department. For example, the branches of science are commonly referred to as scientific disciplines, e.g. physics, chemistry and biology.

É Individuals associated with academic disciplines are commonly referred to as experts or specialists. Others, who may have studied other subjects rather than concentrating in a specific academic discipline, are classified as generalists.

É While academic disciplines in and of themselves are more or less focused practices, scholarly approaches - multidisciplinary / interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary, and cross-disciplinary- integrate aspects from multiple academic disciplines. They address any problems that may arise from narrow concentration within specialized fields of study.

É Academic discipline is also known as field of study. Field of inquiry, research field and branch of knowledge are the different terms used in different countries and fields to denote a discipline