

Social Science Research Council
Mellon Mays Graduate Initiatives Program
Annual Graduate Student Summer Conference
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Bryn Mawr College
Bryn Mawr, PA

Life of the Mind: The Academic Occupation

Ph.D. is an abbreviation of the Latin, *philosophiae doctor*. To earn this degree in any discipline, the scholar must develop an original contribution. As with the pursuit of tenure, the expectation is that such a scholar will demonstrate proficiency in a specific methodological framework and prove that the investigation has enriched a distinct body of scholarly literature. Being deemed an expert in any specific field inevitably shapes the scholarly persona we cultivate and influences subsequent research. At the same time, scholarship that reaches across boundaries sheds insight on vexing social and theoretical problems that are not reducible to any particular field of study. The ability to cross boundaries and put forward ideas and research that is pertinent to one's own scholarly niche but which also speaks across disciplines is becoming increasingly relevant. This begs the following questions: How do we define ourselves within our fields? How do our lives as academics, scholarly approaches and pursuits evolve as our journeys progress? How can we nurture discourse across fields but still put forward cutting edge research pertinent to our own area of expertise?

Instead of being stymied by these dynamics, we hope that participants in the 2012 MMUF Annual Summer Conference might use the tension between focused domains of inquiry and broader intellectual questions to develop panel abstracts based on research that engages with, but is not reducible to, the concerns emanating from any discrete field of study. In exploring "The Academic Occupation" from different angles, we encourage conference participants to reflect on challenges that stem from training in a particular discipline while communicating with scholars in other domains of inquiry; to choose a mentor that privileges training as much as empowerment; to consider that there are as many ways to be a scholar as there are scholars; to examine the intellectual and political stakes that shape the production and reception of diverse scholarly arguments. By creating a forum to foster deliberation about these issues, we hope to cultivate the most ambitious possibilities of the occupation to which we are dedicated.