Call for Participation (PhD students in all disciplines)

The Uses and Futures of Interdisciplinary Legal Studies

http://ils2018.weebly.com/

A one-day Conference at the University of Kent, Canterbury

15th June 2018

Kent Law School is proud to launch and host the inaugural Interdisciplinary Legal Studies (ILS) Network and bi-annual Conference. The inaugural postgraduate research conference titled The Uses and Futures of Interdisciplinary Legal Studies aims to provide an initial forum towards the critical exploration of interdisciplinary research/studies in and of law, as well as the formation of an informal research network between cognate PhD students (Interdisciplinary Legal Studies Network – ILS) and Law Schools. The following Schools have already joined the ILS network: Kent Law School, Westminster Law School, Birkbeck Law School, Warwick Law School, Universidad de los Andes, Law School, Melbourne Law School, LSE Law School, Science Po, Law School and the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais Law School.

The Conference will not follow the conventional pattern of papers and plenaries, but rather aim for collective discussion at first in small groups, and then more widely with the support of 6 Guest Scholars: Prof. Diamond Ashiagbor (Institute of Advanced Legal Studies); Prof. Kate Bedford (Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham); Prof. Emilios Christodoulidis (School of Law, University of Glasgow); Dr. Emilie Cloatre (Reader in Law, Kent Law School, University of Kent); Prof. Marieke de Goede (Department of Politics, University of Amsterdam); and Prof. Ambreena Manji (School of Law and Politics, Cardiff University).

In order to facilitate participation and collective reflection PhD students in law, as well as PhD students in other disciplines, with an interest in thinking about law, however widely conceived) are invited to submit:

(1) a 200-word summary of their doctoral research project; and

(2) a 200-word summary brief on their experience of/reflection on interdisciplinary research in/of law.

Please email your briefs to: KLSResearch@kent.ac.uk by 15th March 2018
Conference Theme

Arguably, modern legal scholarship is today more vibrant, complex and inter-disciplinary than ever before. Legal studies and legal practices are increasingly informed by a wide range of complex interdisciplinary borrowing, interaction and cooperation. Furthermore, different approaches to legal research and education, as varied as doctrinal, neo-realist, socio-legal, feminist, neo-Marxist, law-in-action, critical, contextual and so forth, appear to concur, often through a growing degree of self-criticism, that the emergence of sophisticated interdisciplinary scholarship amidst various political perspectives, methods and disciplines has influenced or, at least, to an extent challenged legal teaching, learning, researching, decision-making, concept-constructing and vocational practice. Our primary concern in this conference is with inquiring into the manner and purpose of the interdisciplinary research experience in contemporary broad-minded legal studies.

Interdisciplinary practices and aims have been subject to contention, as well as variation and recalibration, for many decades. Is it, for instance, disciplinary integration and/or interaction that are aimed at? Is it, instead, juxtaposition, coordination, and the rigorous ability to read parallel sequences (often categorized as falling under 'multidisciplinarity')? Is it the critique of the structural formation of knowledges, or the ultimate transcending of a discipline that is aimed at (its transformation, often categorized under the name of ‘transdisciplinarity’)?

What if, however, interdisciplinary legal research aimed at neither a mere self-sufficient juxtaposition, nor an over-ambitious synthesis? Who would be the audience and what would be the purpose of interdisciplinary research and study of law and in law? It is often observed, for example, that interdisciplinary attempts in legal research borrow methods or material (however successfully) from another discipline in order to then near-exclusively address a legal audience, without manifesting, in fact, a genuine attempt to study as well as
engage with that other discipline’s audience. What, then, if interdisciplinarity begins only once it admits that distinctions run through disciplines as much as between them and that therefore one has to study them rigorously in all sorts of ways (be they methodological and theoretical, instrumental and critical, endogenous and exogenous etc.)?

Academic disciplines are indeed contingent and highly permeable products of complex historical processes. Distinctions and synergies between disciplines are equally contingent on different histories and cultures (for example, history is the foundational social science in France, while in Britain it is categorized under the humanities; equally we can ask: is law a social science or a part of the humanities?). Lacking some kind of absolute consistency, disciplines differentiate their functions through transforming knowledges and practices, in the self-defining and self-serving interior dynamics. Disciplines are however a recent modern invention and, more than it is usually admitted, they have always remained in a state of almost permanent ‘crisis’, flux and cognitive (as well political or social) challenge. Within the institution of the University disciplinary self-definition and self-defense has intensified, often forgetting that disciplines themselves are re-created or redefined through collisions between differing cognitive spheres.

Interdisciplinarity, it is then proposed, may be neither a panacea for all the problems one encounters in legal research and higher education more widely, nor an unnecessary opportune distraction from the rigor of a disciplinary program of study. In addition, interdisciplinarity, in its multiple and complex formations and deformations, should not be constrained by the success of its hype. Too often, as a mostly managerial or marketing buzzword without much challenging substance, it has infiltrated Universities to the point that now almost all departments and all disciplines aim to foster interdisciplinarity in research and education. While it is most challenging a climate in which we find ourselves, we think that there has not been a better time to consider, anew, and with persistent care, the paths, claims and challenges of inter/disciplinarity in legal research (and by extension education more broadly). If interdisciplinarity is not to be or remain an empty signifier, yet another fashionable façade of progress and innovation (or even the latest desperate attempt to de-socialise and isolate knowledge), we need to ask what becomes of/in interdisciplinary formations and deformations of knowledge?

**Fees:**
Registration Fee: £35

**Website:**
More details on the Conference, Travel, Accommodation and related matters will be regularly updated at the Conference’s site which can be visited at:

http://ils2018.weebly.com/

**Contact:**
If you have any questions please feel free to contact: