Topics in French Culture and Society: Excursions in interdisciplinarity
G46.2810 (G14.3396, G57.2808)

Susan Carol Rogers
Kelly Mulroney
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Tuesdays 6:10 - 8:10 pm

At the turn of the century, the French sociologist François Simiand sparked a debate among sociologists, historians, and geographers about the relationships among the disciplines in the human sciences. Throughout this century, French scholars have periodically experimented with cross-disciplinary research and the division of intellectual labor. At times, their exchanges have resulted in accusations of intellectual imperialism, while at other times they have stressed fruitful collaboration. The 1920s/30s and the 1960s/70s constituted two notable periods of collaborative work.

This course aims to explore the challenges and potentials of cross-disciplinary collaboration, as well as some characteristic distinctions among historical and social science approaches to the study of society. The focus will be on cross-disciplinary projects and lively debates around them articulated by French scholars during the 1920s and 30s, and during the 1960s and 70s, most of them concerned with the study of rural France. Readings will include programmatic statements aiming to define disciplinary distinctions and collaborations, as well as examples of collaborative or parallel studies by historians and social scientists (especially geographers, sociologists, anthropologists) on selected topics (e.g. tools and technology, family and kinship). We will also consider the institutional contexts helping to shape disciplinary distinctions and communication in the French setting.

*** Course taught in English; most readings in French ***