Lost in Translation? On the Disciplinary Status of Public Relations

Thursday 5th April 2012
1.00pm – 2.30pm
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Abstract:
The presentation will concern the current status of public relations as a contested field of research and address PR’s contested place between diverse academic disciplines and scientific traditions. In contrast to the main stream of publications which cherish the imperialism of the discipline with claims that interdisciplinary input will enrich the discipline, and that PR scholarship will profit from this knowledge transfer, the paper argues that the diversity of the field has led to a problematic situation where PR’s academic respect and influence as well as scientific progress are hampered by the excessive pluralism and eclecticism of the field and its failure to formulate a consistent body of ‘core knowledge’. The paper addresses this unsatisfying status quo and wants to give insights on this problem gained from adjacent fields of research, like sociology, communication science, and organizational studies. A special focus will be laid on the question of scientific progress and whether or not it is reasonable to assess the question in PR. The paper will discuss selected contributions on the topic from philosophers, historians and sociologists of science and present different perspectives on the question. In a second step, it will discuss why it is so hard for PR to achieve the same level of progress that appears to be possible for the natural sciences.