Critical self-reflection has been vital to the humanities from their inception. Whatever their specific field of research, humanities scholars have always understood that field to include conceptual questions about their disciplinary practice and mode of thought. Without this inbuilt reflexive moment, much of the vigour and creativity of scholarly endeavour would have been lost. But such self-reflection has equally entailed disciplinary instability, and even a permanent sense of ‘crisis.’ The continuing postmodern transformation of higher education compels a new return to this critical dynamic. It requires the humanities to re-conceive their position within the broader institutional matrix in which they will flourish or wither.

Prominent avenues for discussion include:

- Changes to the relationship between humanities scholarship within the academy and the broader cultures of literary, artistic and historical production beyond. Are the disciplines conducive to dialogue with the wider community, or do they impede it?
- Shifts in the relations between disciplines. How has the blurring of disciplinary boundaries opened up new fields and methods? Conversely, in what ways has it invited disciplinary drift and loss of purpose? What are the implications when new interdisciplinary fields diverge from institutional structures based on established disciplines?
- Shifts in the relations between humanities disciplines and faculties with a more professional orientation (e.g. business or law). In what ways are the humanities conforming to or diverging from professional models of graduate employability and industry linkage? What are the likely effects of this?
- The ramifications for disciplinarity of new digital technologies. How are these transforming the academic landscape of publishing, pedagogy and research?
- The rise of audit culture. What are the implications of new metrics such as ERA for existing and future configurations of the disciplines? How are these metrics reshaping scholarly practices?
- The democratization of knowledge and the shifting constituencies of higher education. Can the integrity of existing disciplines be sustained as global access to higher education continues both to expand and to become more market-based? Should it be sustained?

A conversation addressing these questions was opened in February 2011 at an HRC roundtable on the fate of the disciplines led by Professor James Chandler. To extend this existing conversation, this continuing HRC series will chart possible disciplinary futures by rethinking the institutional history of the present. More specifically, the series will reconsider salient moments of critical self-reflection in the light of the material conditions reshaping teaching and research in the humanities today.