HIST 2981F:
THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Brown University
Department of History
Time: Thurs. 4-6:30pm
Spring, 2015

Professor: Lukas Rieppel
OH: M 3:30-4:30 & T 12-1
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Course Description: This is a graduate level reading seminar designed to introduce students to some of the major texts, themes, and theoretical debates in the History of Science and STS (Science and Technology Studies). Although it is primarily concerned with critically situating and historically contextualizing the construction of scientific knowledge, the literature surveyed in this course has had an enormous influence beyond the narrow confines of science studies. Because they provide scholars in the humanities with tools to engage much broader questions of expertise, authority, and knowledge creation, a thorough engagement with these texts will prove useful to a broad range of students, including those who might not self-identify as historians of science, technology, and medicine.

We will begin with a historical introduction to science studies, tracing how the field has evolved over time. We will then spend several weeks examining some of the most lively and influential debates that currently shape the field, ranging from the history of epistemic virtues like objectivity to book history and print culture as well as historical epistemology and ontology.

Seminar Paper: In addition to completing the readings and contributing to weekly discussion, you will be expected to use the methodological tools and theoretical perspective developed in this course to write a seminar paper of approximately 25 pages.

There are two different genres of seminar papers that will work well for this course. The first is a “review essay” that critically engages a particular debate in the literature that we have discussed. I expect such review essays to be reasonably comprehensive, meaning that you will need to complete additional reading outside of class. I will also expect you to defend an original thesis of your own. Alternatively, you may choose to write a more empirical paper. In this case, you will be expected to use some of the literature discussed in this course as an interpretive frame to help you think through material you have encountered elsewhere. Ideally, you will deal with material from an area that you are hoping to write about in your dissertation, which need not be historical in nature. It may also be ethnographic, sociological, philosophical, and so on.
Readings: Each week, I have chosen one or more texts to list as “required readings.” Everyone is expected to have read these sources thoroughly and come to class prepared to engage in a discussion based on familiarity with the arguments they present. In addition, I have also indicated several “optional / additional” sources. These are not required, and I do not expect you to read them or make reference to them in our discussions. Rather, I include them primarily for students who find the themes discussed during a particular week of special interest and relevance, and who would like to follow up with additional readings on that theme. The optional / additional sources may also be of potential use if you would like to more deeply engage some particular literature in your term paper.

Participation: Starting with our second meeting, I will ask each of you (or a team of you, depending on how many students end up enrolling in the course) to provide a brief, ten-minute introduction to the week’s readings. In your introduction, you will be tasked with providing a very short overview of the main arguments presented in each reading, as well as formulating a small number of questions that you think the group might fruitfully address in our discussions. Your participation mark for the seminar will be based in part (15%) on this short presentation, and in part (15%) on your contributions to group discussion over the course of the semester.

Peer Review: I will ask you to print out and bring a rough draft of your seminar paper to class during the 9th week of the term. I will pair you up with a fellow student, asking you to exchange papers. The following week, please bring about two pages of constructive feedback on your partner’s essay draft. I will also set aside some time in the seminar for you to discuss your papers and provide one another with advice in person. Please provide me with a copy of your “peer review” by email as well, which will make up 10% of your final grade.

Due Dates:
March 19: rough draft of seminar paper (about 10 pages)
April 2: “peer review” of paper drafts
May 6: final draft of seminar paper (about 25 pages)

Assessment:
Participation ............ 30%
Peer Review ............ 10%
Seminar Paper ............ 60%
Week 1 (Jan 22): Introduction and Overview

No assigned readings.

Week 2 (Jan 29): HPS & SSK


Optional / Additional


Week 3 (Feb 5): Historicizing the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge


Week 4 (Feb 12): Gender and Science


Optional / Additional


**Week 5 (Feb 19): Science & Technology Studies**


*Additional / Optional*


**Week 6 (Feb 26): Scientific Personae**


*Optional / Additional*


**Week 7 (March 5): Post-Colonial & Global Science**


Bleichmar, Daniela. “Visible empire: scientific expeditions and visual culture in the Hispanic enlightenment” in *Postcolonial Studies,* Vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 441-466.


*Optional / Additional*


Week 8 (March 12): The Turn to Practice


Optional / Additional


Week 9 (March 19): Materiality


Optional / Additional


***Note: a 10 page rough draft of your term paper will be due in class, which you will share with a classmate for “peer review.”***

Week 10 (April 2): Knowledge Economies


Optional / Additional


***Note: a 2-page “peer review” of your classmate’s essay draft will be due in class***

Week 11 (April 9): Technology


Week 12 (April 16): No Class

Lukas Rieppel will be traveling to a conference.

Week 13 (April 23): Objectivity


*Additional / Optional*


Week 14 (April 30): Historicizing Epistemology & Ontology


*Additional / Optional*


