History of Science 720: Proseminar in Historiography and Methods

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Office hours: Wednesday 3–5 pm

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L173 Education
Thursday 2:25–4:55 pm

This course provides an introduction to the scholarly field that is the history of science. It gives a brief overview of some of the major themes and issues that occupy the field, and the different approaches scholars have used to address their questions. In the first section course, we will read texts that were formative in the development of the history of science (such as Kuhn's widely read book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), as well as texts that are representative of different approaches that are paradigmatic in the field (such as the turn towards studying the practices of science instead of ideas or concepts). The second section of the course is comprised of clusters of readings that represent different subfields or areas of research interest with the history of science, and each of these weeks will be co-led by a guest instructor from the program who works in that area. This section of the course has a dual purpose: to introduce you to faculty members and their research strengths, and to give you a sampling of the variety of topics and issues that are currently animating scholarship in the field. The interests of the students enrolled in the class will also direct readings in this section of the course. For week ten we’ll discuss potential questions or research areas relating to your interests that are not well covered by the assigned readings, and I will develop a reading list tailored towards these collectively defined needs. The last class meeting will be reserved for a discussion of your final paper assignments and the observations and/or issues you are encountering in your writing.

Assignments In addition to your active participation in weekly class discussions, you are also required to submit a weekly reading response for 10 of the 12 weeks with assigned readings (this means you get two opportunities to pass on doing a reading response, which you can take whenever best suits your needs). These reflections should be about 500 words and can be informal in nature, touching on issues such as: common themes or arguments in the readings, contrasts between the readings, the
purpose or value of the readings and/or approaches, things that you didn't understand in the readings, or questions that you would like to discuss in class. The aim of the readings responses is to get you thinking about what you'd like to talk about in advance of class, and we'll use the reading responses to help set the agenda for each discussion session. Please post your reading responses to the forum on the Canvas website at least 24 hours before class to allow time for your classmates and me to read them. Class participation and reading responses count for fifty percent of your final grade.

Your final paper assignment for this class will be a historiographical essay that reflects on a particular historical question, subfield of literature, or methodological approach. You can reflect either on texts and issues that we have discussed in class or on a body of literature in history of science (perhaps relating to your research interests) that we did not cover in class, but keep in mind that this is not intended to be a research paper and extensive source work should not be necessary. As part of the scheduled readings we will read several review essays that can serve as exemplars for writing about trends or themes in the discipline. Your paper should be about 15 pages in length, and will be due during the exam period after classes end (exact date to be discussed in class). The final essay counts for the other fifty percent of your final grade.

**Evaluation**  You'll receive feedback on and an interim letter grade for your class participation and reading responses at mid semester. Your cumulative participation/reading responses and final paper will be assigned letter grades at the end of the semester.

**Readings**  Course books will be available on reserve at College Library, and links to articles available through UW–Madison's electronic holdings will be compiled in the electronic course reserves page. Any texts not available through either the physical or electronic reserves will be posted on the Canvas site.

**Course Schedule**

**September 7: Course introduction**

- “What Is Historiography and Why Is It Important?” n.d. [https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/3ew9t8/what_is_historiography_and_why_is_it_important/](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/3ew9t8/what_is_historiography_and_why_is_it_important/)

**September 14: Origins and outlines of the history of science**


**September 21: The practice turn**


**September 28: Circulation**


• Kapil Raj. 2007. Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction. New York: Palgrave Macmillan  (Chapter 2)

**October 5: Great men of science?**


**October 12: Consumers and users**


**October 19: Science and macropolitics**


**October 26: Material agency and “actants”**


**November 2: Producing knowledge and social order**


**November 9: Student choice readings**

- Readings to be determined

**November 16: Transnational knowledge (with Pablo Gómez)**


**November 23: Thanksgiving recess (no class)**

**November 30: Gender and historical analysis (with Marie Hicks)**


**December 7: History of Science meets history of education (with Adam Nelson)**


**December 14: Student paper topic discussion (optional)**

• No assigned readings