Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge

The Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge (SIFK) opened in the fall of 2015 at the University of Chicago as a focal point for scholars to ask, What do we know?

In the current era, this question is more confusing than ever, and answers are hard to come by. We face unreliable news, non-replicable scientific experiments, masses of data, groupthink, cultural relativism, confusion about values, entrenched beliefs, and more.

In such an environment, we seek new methods for asking about the world. At the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge, we aim to understand how factors like history, politics, culture, and religion can shape knowledge—year in and year out, over decades, over centuries. We believe that to understand a phenomenon, one must approach from a number of different fields, and with sensitivity to context. As no area of knowledge arises in a vacuum, we underplay the division of knowledge into departments within the university, offering KNOW courses that bring together perspectives from a number of fields.

About SIFK Courses

Join us for a KNOW course as we try to find new answers to some of the largest and most perennial questions, all bearing on what it means to be human in the 21st century. We offer undergraduates and graduate students team-taught courses that challenge conventional wisdom across the board.

KNOW courses are cross-listed with a variety of departments, so students can enroll in them as a major course with their department's course number or as an elective with the KNOW course number. We also offer a new Experimental Capstone series of courses (XCAP), that brings practice together with theory, inside and outside the classroom—yet another way of broadening academic knowledge and bringing a new dimension to the undergraduate experience.

For up-to-date KNOW course listings, visit sifk.uchicago.edu/courses.

XCAP: The Experimental Capstone

In addition to its KNOW courses, the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge is delighted to announce an unprecedented set of new courses: XCAP, The Experimental Capstone. Designed for upper-level undergraduates, a new XCAP course will be debuted each quarter in 2019–20. XCAP courses, which will be team-taught by faculty from different divisions or schools, are designed to challenge students to build upon their University of Chicago educational experience by adding practice, impact, and influence as important dimensions for undergraduate education.

XCAP courses will incorporate a variety of topics and frameworks, but inherent in each of these courses are the following three elements:

• an element of practice, a result in a product, or a measurable impact;
• an appeal to students from all the collegiate divisions for maximal interaction of different points of view; and
• a part of the College experience with particular relevance to post-College life.

The XCAP courses may be taken Pass/Fail or for a quality grade, and students may take one, two, or all three quarters of XCAP, as the courses are not part of a sequence. Each course will be taught by a different team of faculty and will provide a distinct perspective on the three core elements above.

To see the full listing of 2019–20 XCAP courses, visit sifk.uchicago.edu/courses/xcap.

KNOW Courses

KNOW 12203. Italian Renaissance: Dante, Machiavelli, and the Wars of Popes and Kings. 100 Units.
This course will consider Florence, Rome, and the Italian city-states in the age of plagues and cathedrals, Dante and Machiavelli, Medici and Borgia (1250-1600), with a focus on literature, philosophy, primary sources, the revival of antiquity, and the papacy's entanglement with pan-European politics. We will examine humanism, patronage, politics, corruption, assassination, feuds, art, music, magic, censorship, education, science, heresy, and the roots of the Reformation.
Writing assignments focus on higher-level writing skills, with a creative writing component linked to our in-class live-action-role-played (LARP) reenactment of a Renaissance papal election. This is a Department of History Gateway course.
Instructor(s): A. Palmer Terms Offered: Winter
Prerequisite(s): Graduate students by consent only; register for the course as HIST 90000 (sect 53) Reading and Research: History.
Note(s): History Gateways are introductory courses meant to appeal to first- through third-year students who may not have done previous course work on the topic of the course; topics cover the globe and span the ages.
Equivalent Course(s): SIGN 26034, HIST 12203, CLCV 22216, RLST 22203, MDVL 12203, ITAL 16000
KNOW 15620. Imagining Pagans in the Middle Ages. 100 Units.
This undergraduate course investigates what became of classical paganism during the Christian Middle Ages. How did medieval writers portray Greek and Roman practices of worship and its pantheon of gods? For medieval literate culture, classical myths were both an index of historical difference - 'we no longer believe what they believed' - and an ongoing source of poetic, narrative, and symbolic potency. Through the close-reading of a variety of source texts, the course examines what classical myths and pagan belief means to late-medieval poets and thinkers. In particular, we'll look to how 'imagining pagans' incited the medieval historical imagination; inspired cosmological or proto-scientific thought experiments; disrupted orthodox theology; and finally, worked to establish fiction as a domain of literature. The poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer will be at the heart of the class, but we will also read widely across medieval culture. No previous experience with Middle English is necessary. (Pre-1650)
Instructor(s): Julie Orlemanski; Joe Stadolnik Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): MDVL 15620, ENGL 15620

KNOW 17403. Science, Culture, and Society in Western Civilization II: Early Modern Period. 100 Units.
Renaissance & Enlightenment. This lecture-discussion course examines the development science and scientific philosophy from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. The considerations begin with the recovery of an ancient knowledge in the works of Leonardo, Vesalius, Harvey, and Copernicus. Thereafter the course will focus on Enlightenment science, as represented by Galileo, Descartes, Newton, and Hume. The course will culminate with the work of Darwin, who utilized traditional concepts to inaugurate modern science. For each class, the instructor will provide a short introductory lecture on the texts, and then open discussion to pursue with students the unexpected accomplishments of the authors under scrutiny.
Instructor(s): Robert J. Richards Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 17403, HIPS 17403

KNOW 21418. Darwinism and Literature. 100 Units.
In this course we will explore the notion that literary fiction can contribute to the generation of new knowledge of the human mind, human behavior, and human societies. Some novelists in the late 19th and early 20th century provided fictional portrayals of human nature that were grounded into Darwinian theory. These novelists operated within the conceptual framework of the complementarity of science and literature advanced by Goethe and the other romantics. At a time when novels became highly introspective and psychological, these writers used their literary craftsmanship to explore and illustrate universals aspects of human nature. In this course we read the work of several novelists such as George Elliot, HG Wells, Joseph Conrad, Jack London, Yuvgeny Zamyatin, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Italo Svevo, and Elias Canetti, and discuss how these authors anticipated the discoveries made decades later by cognitive, social, and evolutionary psychology.
Instructor(s): D. Maestripieri & R. Richards Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): HIPS 24921, KNOW 31418, CHSS 34921, CHDV 37861, CHDV 27861

KNOW 21419. Indigenous Knowledge and the Foundations of Modern Social Theory. 100 Units.
Indigenous people are often seen as 'objects' of social theory; this course considers their role as subjects of social theory-makers of modern knowledge who made foundational contributions to basic ideas about humanity. We will take up three case studies, each of which highlights an indigenous people who unleashed a cascade of fresh thinking: the Australian Aborigines who influenced the ideas of Emile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud; the Native peoples of the Northwest Coast of America who stimulated Franz Boas to reconstruct the concept of culture; and the indigenous peoples of the Trobriand Islands who shaped Bronisław Malinowski's ideas about gifts, hospitality, and reciprocity. As we will see, much of what we call social theory turns out to rely on a vast archive of nonstate knowledge generated by indigenous intellectuals.
Instructor(s): Isaiah Lorado Wilner Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): HIPS 21419

KNOW 22709. Introduction to Philosophy of Quantum Mechanics. 100 Units.
In this class we examine some of the conceptual problems associated with quantum mechanics. We will critically discuss some common interpretations of quantum mechanics, such as the Copenhagen interpretation, the many-worlds interpretation and Bohmian mechanics. We will also examine some implications of results in the foundations of quantum theory concerning non-locality, contextuality and realism. (B) (II)
Instructor(s): T. Pashby Terms Offered: Spring
Prerequisite(s): Prior knowledge of quantum mechanics is not required since we begin with an introduction to the formalism. Only familiarity with high school geometry is presupposed but expect to be introduced to other mathematical tools as needed.
Equivalent Course(s): PHIL 32709, PHIL 22709, CHSS 32709, HIPS 22709

KNOW 24112. Screening India: Bollywood and Beyond. 100 Units.
Cinema is, unarguably, the medium most apposite for thinking through the complexities of democratic politics, especially so in a place like India. While Indian cinema has recently gained international currency through the song and dance ensembles of Bollywood, there remains much more to be said about that body of films. Moreover, Bollywood is a small (though very important) part of Indian cinema. Through a close analysis of a wide range of films in Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, and Urdu, this course will ask if Indian cinema can be thought of as a form of knowledge of the twentieth century.
Instructor(s): R. Majumdar Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): CMST 24112, HIST 36808, HIST 26808, GNSE 24112, SALC 20511, CMST 34112, GNSE 34112, SALC 30511, KNOW 34112
KNOW 26000. BIG: Monumental Buildings and Sculptures in the Past and Present. 100 Units.
Why are so many societies - including our own - obsessed with building monumental things like pyramids and palaces?
What do we learn about cultures past and present from the monuments they built? This course explores famous monuments from around the world to answer these questions through the lens of archaeology, architecture, and art history.
Instructor(s): James Osborne Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): SIGN 26000, NEHC 20085

KNOW 27016. Comparative Metahistory. 100 Units.
The seminar will focus on classical, medieval, and modern historiography from China, India, and Tibet seeking answers to three general questions: (1) How are senses of historical time created in Asian historiographies by means of rhetorical figures of repetition, parallelism, dramatic emplotment, frame stories, and interweaving storylines? (2) How are historical persons and events given meaning through use of poetic devices, such as comparison, simile, and metaphor? And (3) How do Asian histories impose themselves as realistic accounts of the past by means of authoritative devices using citation of temporal-spatial facts, quotation of authority, and/or reliance on established historical genres? The methods employed to answer these questions are here adapted from pre-modern Asian knowledge systems of literary theory, poetics, dramaturgy, and epistemology, and thus permit looking at other knowledge formations from within the discourse of the traditions themselves.
Instructor(s): Haun Saussy (University of Chicago) & Ulrich Timme Kragh (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland) Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): EALC 37016, KNOW 37016, CMLT 27016, EALC 27016

KNOW 27017. Passing. 100 Units.
In this course, we examine how people move within and between categories of identity, with particular attention to boundary crossings of race and gender in U.S. law and literature from the nineteenth century to the present. Law provides a venue and a language through which forces of authority police categories of identity that, at Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado observe, “society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient.” Readings will include theoretical texts as well as court rulings, cultural ephemera, and literary texts.
Instructor(s): Nicolette I. Bruner Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): GNSE 27017, CRES 27017, ENGL 27017

KNOW 27860. History of Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences. 100 Units.
This course will consist in lectures and discussion sessions about the historical and conceptual foundations of evolutionary behavioral sciences (evolutionary anthropology, evolutionary psychology, ethology, comparative behavioral biology), covering the period from the publication of Charles Darwin’s The Origin of Species up to the present day. Topics will include new theoretical developments, controversies, interdisciplinary expansions, and the relationships between evolutionary behavioral sciences and other disciplines in the sciences and the humanities.
Instructor(s): D. Maestripieri Terms Offered: Autumn
Prerequisite(s): N/A
Equivalent Course(s): CHDV 27860, HIPS 27860, CHDV 37860, HLTH 27860, CHSS 37860

KNOW 28000. Tutorial: Antiquity, Archaeology, and Anthropology: Humanism and the Rise of Science in Germany. 100 Units.
What do Homeric poetry and human skulls have in common? What about the Old Testament and Mycenaean pottery shards? Or Roman ruins and entomology? They were all used to illuminate the course of human history and they all transformed pre-existing conceptions about the past. This course traces the development of the human sciences from a general and preparatory program of humanistic study into specialized research disciplines focused on the production of new knowledge. Through a focus on the study of antiquity, archaeology, and anthropology in Germany, students will examine how information about the humanity and its past was produced, what the function or purpose of such knowledge was, and how this changed over time. They will also investigate the ways in which broader political, social, and cultural concerns shaped scientific research and were, in turn, shaped (or not) by it. In so doing this class explores how, why, and in what ways the development of German science was fundamentally and intrinsically shaped by humanistic inquiries about history and humanity. It also challenges linear notions of disinterested, secular, scientific progress as well as the modern division between natural sciences, human sciences, and the humanities.
Instructor(s): K. Palmieri Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): HIPS 29633, HIST 25017

KNOW 28900. Magic, Science, and Religion. 100 Units.
The relationship between the categories of magic, science, and religion has been a problem for modern social science since its inception in the nineteenth century. In the first half of this course, we will critically examine some of the classical and contemporary approaches to these concepts. In the second half, we will explore a number of detailed historical and ethnographic studies about modern phenomena that call some of the fundamental assumptions behind these categories into question.
Instructor(s): A. Doostdar Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): ANTH 23906, AASR 30501, RLST 28900
KNOW 29901. XCAP: The Experimental Capstone - The Art of Healing: Medical Aesthetics in Russia and the U.S.
100 Units.
What makes a medical treatment look like it will work? What makes us feel that we are receiving good care, or that we can be cured? Why does the color of a pill influence its effectiveness, and how do placebos sometimes achieve what less inert medication cannot? In this course we will consider these problems from the vantage points of a physician and a cultural historian. Our methodology will combine techniques of aesthetic analysis with those of medical anthropology, history and practice. We will consider the narratology of medicine as we examine the way that patients tell their stories-and the way that doctors, nurses, buildings, wards, and machines enter those narratives. The latter agents derive their meaning from medical outcomes, but are also embedded in a field of aesthetic values that shape their apperception. We will look closely at a realm of medical experience that continues to evade the grasp of instruments: how the aesthetic experience shapes the phenomenon of medical treatment.
Instructor(s): William Nickell; Brian Callender; Elizabeth Murphy Terms Offered: Autumn
Note(s): This course is one of three offered in The Experimental Capstone (XCAP) in the 2019-20 academic year. Enrollment in this course is restricted to 3rd and 4th year undergraduates in the College. For more information about XCAP, visit https://sifk.uchicago.edu/courses/xcap/
Equivalent Course(s): ANTH 24360, BIOS 29209, ARTV 20014, HIPS 28350

KNOW 29941. XCAP: The Experimental Capstone - The Affect System. 100 Units.
The Affect system in Medicine and the Political Science is a multidisciplinary course that aims to explore the concept of "affect" from different angles and unique perspectives. Drawing broadly from Medicine, philosophy and the political science, this course seeks to understand the affect system in different cultures and environments. The term "affect" typically refers to feelings beyond those of the traditional senses, with an emphasis on the experience of emotions and variations in hedonic tone. The structure and processes underlying mental contents are not readily apparent, however, and most cognitive processes occur non-consciously with only selected outcomes reaching awareness. Over millions of years of evolution, efficient and manifold mechanisms have evolved for differentiating hostile from hospitable stimuli and for organizing adaptive responses to these stimuli. These are critically important functions for the evolution of mammals, and the integrated set of mechanisms that serve these functions can be thought of as an "affect system." It is this affect system - its architecture and operating characteristics, as viewed from neural, psychological, social, and political perspectives, that is the focus of the course.
Instructor(s): Stephanie Cacioppo and Eric Oliver Terms Offered: Winter
Note(s): This course is one of three offered in The Experimental Capstone (XCAP) in the 2019-20 academic year. Enrollment in this course is restricted to 3rd and 4th year undergraduates in the College. For more information about XCAP, visit https://sifk.uchicago.edu/courses/xcap/
Equivalent Course(s): PSYC 29941

KNOW 29971. XCAP: The Experimental Capstone - What is an Intervention (for Mental Health)? 100 Units.
What does it mean for a practice to be understood as an intervention in the domain of mental health? Interventions in mental health can be carried out with tools ranging from chemicals and electrical impulses, to words, affects, and social relationships, to organizations. They can involve acting on a range of distinct targets -- from brains and bodies to psyches and emotional conflicts to housing and employment. This course will use a focus on mental health interventions to introduce students to a range of conceptual and practical issues surrounding mental health and illness, as well as to raise a set of broader questions about the relationships between knowledge formation, practice, ethics, and politics. The questions we will ask throughout the course will include: What does it mean for an intervention to be successful? How is effectiveness understood and measured? Are mental health interventions ethically-neutral or do they contain embedded within them assumptions about the normal, the pathological, and the good life? We will think through these questions vis-a-vis readings drawn from psychiatry, psychology, and the social sciences -- but more importantly, through weekly practical and experiential activities. Each week will focus on one kind of mental health intervention, and will involve a particular kind of practical learning activity.
Instructor(s): Michael Marcangelo and Eugene Raikhel Terms Offered: Spring
Note(s): This course is one of three offered in The Experimental Capstone (XCAP) in the 2019-20 academic year. Enrollment in this course is restricted to 3rd and 4th year undergraduates in the College. For more information about XCAP, visit https://sifk.uchicago.edu/courses/xcap/
Equivalent Course(s): CHDV 20971
Font Notice

This document should contain certain fonts with restrictive licenses. For this draft, substitutions were made using less legally restrictive fonts. Specifically:

- Times was used instead of Trajan.
- Times was used instead of Palatino.

The editor may contact Leepfrog for a draft with the correct fonts in place.