The Institute on the Formation of Knowledge

Department Website: https://sifk.uchicago.edu/courses

The Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge unites scholars from a variety of fields to study the process of knowledge formation and transmittal from antiquity to the present day and, in correlation, to explore how this history shapes the modern world. By rigorously exploring the underlying influences on what is accepted as true, the institute aims to understand the basis of human values and provide insights into contemporary issues.

The institute’s Faculty and External Faculty Group are committed to investigating all aspects of the processes by which cultures claim to know what they know. Where are the boundaries between knowledge and belief? What techniques do cultures deploy to encode and verify information, and how do technological developments—in forensics and measurement, for example—impinge on these areas? What awareness do societies show regarding what is contingent about their deepest commitments? These questions may be put historically and cross-culturally. They also need urgently to be posed about those who work in notionally rational modern institutions, such as the university and the lab.

The Stevanovich Institute joins these faculty with fellows at every stage of the career from graduate and post-graduate to senior visiting scholars, in the context of the extraordinary resources of the University of Chicago, to question and enrich each other, in conversation about the past, present, and future of human knowledge.

KNOW courses are offered by the faculty (https://sifk.uchicago.edu/directory-page) and fellows (https://sifk.uchicago.edu/directory-page/postdoctoral-fellows) of the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge at both the graduate and the advanced undergraduate levels. 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.

For undergraduate funding opportunities, events, and up-to-date course listings, visit sifk.uchicago.edu.

XCAP: The Experimental Capstone

In addition to its regular KNOW courses, and as an unprecedented experience in undergraduate teaching, the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge will be offering, XCAP: The Experimental Capstone, with one new class debuting each quarter of 2018–19. These team-taught courses are for fourth-year students only and will challenge them 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:

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

All XCAP courses will be team-taught by faculty from different divisions or schools and will involve two or three faculty or postdoctoral fellows. Students may take one, two, or all three courses as they wish. Admission will be by application, and a cohort of no more than 15 will be selected. For details see the Stevanovich Institute website: https://sifk.uchicago.edu/courses/xcap/.

Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge 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: Spring
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 1st- through 3rd-yr 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): RLST 22203, CLCV 22216, HIST 12203, SIGN 26034, ITAL 16000
KNOW 15013. Medicine and Society in America. 100 Units.
The course provides an introduction to central questions in American medicine from the early colonial period to the present day. Topics covered include epidemics in the early colonies; frontier medicine and alternative healers; urbanization, hygiene and the state; race, empire, and medicine; sexual health and reproductive rights; the politics of addiction; and the rise of biomedicine, genetics, and genomics, among others. Students will gain from this course both an understanding of major trends and transformations in American medicine, as well as a more nuanced feel for present-day debates about health-care rights and policies in America. Requirements will include short weekly responses to class readings and a final paper of six to eight pages.
Instructor(s): M. Rossi
Note(s): History Gateways are introductory courses meant to appeal to 1st- through 3rd-yr 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): HIST 15003, HIPS 15013

KNOW 17403. Science, Culture, and Society in Western Civilization II: Early Modern Period. 100 Units.
Section 1, offered by Robert J. Richards - "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. Section 2, offered by Margaret Carlyle - "Revolutions in Astronomy & Anatomy." This course explores scientific developments in Western Europe from the sixteenth-century Scientific Revolution to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. During this period, European understandings of the natural world-and ways of achieving such understandings-underwent a series of radical and far-reaching transformations that are often called the Scientific Revolution.
Instructor(s): Robert J. Richards, Margaret Carlyle Terms Offered: Autumn Winter 2018, and by Margaret Carlyle in Winter 2019.
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 17403, HIPS 17403

KNOW 21415. Evolution Before Darwin. 100 Units.
This course will explore the emergence and development of evolutionary thought prior to Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species (1859). We will pay particular attention to the way in which transformism was a feature of nineteenth-century thought more generally, connecting natural history to astronomy, theology, and the study of humanity. Natural philosophers and later scientists who wished to make arguments concerning nature’s deep past and hidden or obscured processes (such as the long-term transformations of stars, strata, and organic species) faced an essential problem: the power of observation and experiment was limited. Our class will interrogate this problem, and examine the way in which the development of evolutionary thought prior to Darwin was intimately connected to contentious debates regarding speculation and scientific method. We will conclude by contemplating the ways in which the ideas and challenges raised by transformism and evolution influenced the reception of Darwin’s work, and the way in which these ideas and challenges remain embedded within seemingly disparate fields of study today.
Instructor(s): J. Daly Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): ORGB 30415, HIST 25316, ECEV 30415, HIPS 21415

KNOW 21416. Reproduction and Motherhood in Multimedia (1800-present) 100 Units.
What do artificial wombs, monstrous creations, and dystopian medical landscapes have in common? Answers to these questions are the subject of this interdisciplinary course in which we explore the many ways in which human reproduction has entered multimedia from the eighteenth century through present. In our course, the concept of "reproduction" will be problematized through film, advertising, texts, literature, and objects. Through these sources, we will critically explore how popular representations of human reproduction have shaped the status of the female body and notions of motherhood over time. We will also see how the liberating potential of new forms of multimedia have often served to reinforce--rather than resist or re-imagine--longstanding motifs and beliefs surrounding the maternal body and womanhood, from the image of the hysterical woman to that of the monstrous mother. Themes covered include the science of reproduction, hysteria, monstrousities, maternal imagination, artificial life, race, contraception, infertility, and sex education.
Instructor(s): Margaret Carlyle Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): HIPS 21416, GNSE 21416, CRES 21416

KNOW 22709. Introduction to Quantum Mechanics, Introduction to Philosophy of Quantum Mechanics. 100 Units.
In this course 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. In this course 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)
Instructor(s): T. Pushby Terms Offered: Winter
Prerequisite(s): Prior knowledge of quantum mechanics is not required since we begin with an introduction to the formalism, but familiarity with matrices, freshman calculus and high school geometry will be presupposed.
Equivalent Course(s): HIPS 22709, PHIL 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, SALC 20511, HIST 36808, SALC 30511, KNOW 34112, HIST 26808, CMST 34112

KNOW 25308. Lab, Field, and Clinic: History and Anthropology of Medicine and the Life Sciences. 100 Units.

In this course we will examine the ways in which different groups of people—with different times and places—have understood the nature of life and living things, bodies and bodily processes, and health and disease, among other notions. We will address these issues principally, though not exclusively, through the lens of the changing sets of methods and practices commonly recognizable as science and medicine. We will also pay close attention to the methods through which scholars in history and anthropology have written about these topics, and how current scientific and medical practices affect historical and anthropological studies of science and medicine.

Instructor(s): M. Rossi
Terms Offered: Winter
Note(s): This course fulfills part of the KNOW core seminar requirement. PhD students should register for KNOW 40202 to be eligible to apply for the SIFK dissertation fellowship.
Equivalent Course(s): HIPS 25808, KNOW 40202, HIST 25308, CHSS 35308, HIST 35308, ANTH 24307, ANTH 34307

KNOW 25425. Censorship, Info Control, & Revolutions in Info Technology from the Printing Press to the Internet. 100 Units.

The digital revolution is triggering a wave of new information control efforts and censorship attempts, ranging from monopolistic copyright laws to the “Great Firewall” of China. The print revolution after 1450 was a moment like our own, when the explosive dissemination of a new information technology triggered a wave of information control efforts. Many of today’s attempts at information control closely parallel early responses to the printing press, so the premodern case gives us centuries of data showing how diverse attempts to control or censor information variously incentivized, discouraged, curated, silenced, commodified, or nurtured art, thought, and science. This unique course is part of a collaborative research project funded by the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society and is co-organized with digital information expert Cory Doctorow. The course will bring pairs of experts working on the print and digital revolutions to campus to discuss parallels between their research with the class. Classes will be open to the public, filmed, and shared on the Internet to create an international public conversation. This is also a Department of History “Making History” course: rather than writing traditional papers, students will create web resources and publications (print and digital) to contribute to the ongoing collaborative research project.

Instructor(s): A. Johns & A. Palmer
Terms Offered: Autumn
Note(s): Making History courses forgo traditional paper assignments for innovative projects that develop new skills with professional applications in the working world. Open to students at all levels, but especially recommended for 3rd- and 4th-yr students. This course fulfills part of the KNOW core seminar requirement. PhD students should register for KNOW 40103 to be eligible to apply for the SIFK dissertation fellowship.
Equivalent Course(s): MAAD 15425, CHSS 35425, SIGN 26035, BPRO 25425, HIPS 25425, HIST 35425, KNOW 40103, HIST 25425, HREL 35425

KNOW 27004. Babylon and the Origins of Knowledge. 100 Units.

In 1946 the famed economist John Maynard Keynes declared that Isaac Newton “was the last of the magicians, the last of the Babylonians.” We find throughout history, in the writings of Galileo, Jorge Luis Borges, Ibn Khaldun, Herodotus, and the Hebrew Bible, a city of Babylon full of contradictions. At once sinful and reverential, a site of magic and science, rational and irrational, Babylon seemed destined to resound in the historical imagination as the birthplace of knowledge itself. But how does the myth compare to history? How did the Babylonians themselves envisage their own knowledge? And is it reasonable to draw, as Keynes did, a line that begins with Babylon and ends with Newton? In this course we will take a cross-parallel between their research with the class. Classes will be open to the public, filmed, and shared on the Internet to create an international public conversation. This is also a Department of History “Making History” course: rather than writing traditional papers, students will create web resources and publications (print and digital) to contribute to the ongoing collaborative research project.

Instructor(s): E. Escobar
Terms Offered: Autumn
Note(s): This course fulfills part of the KNOW core seminar requirement. PhD students should register for KNOW 40103 to be eligible to apply for the SIFK dissertation fellowship.
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 25617, NEHC 20215, HIPS 27004

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 2018
Prerequisite(s): N/A
Equivalent Course(s): CHDV 37860, CHDV 27860, CHSS 37860, HIPS 27860
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: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): RLST 28900, ANTH 23906

KNOW 29629. Tutorial: Romantic Bodies: Theater in the History of Science and Medicine. 100 Units.
It seems that science and theater have long shared an ambiguous treatment as amoral yet bordering the ethically suspect. Scientific, medical, and technological advancements alter our everyday lives in profound ways and theater can play with the development and repercussions of these advancements, altering our memories of history. This stimulates a line of questioning for historians who view “science plays,” or plays that use science as the basis of their content and often also their form. In this tutorial, we will explore how these plays can (or cannot) fit into intellectual history as well as social and cultural histories of science. We will investigate how these plays can act as vehicles for remembering (or reconstructing) histories of science, reminding ourselves that the moral quandaries and ethical dilemmas that we juggle in science and medicine are as recurring as the theatrical productions are.
Instructor(s): Ashley Clark Terms Offered: Autumn. Autumn 2018
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 24920, HIPS 29629

KNOW 29630. Tutorial: History and Philosophy of Social Science. 100 Units.
Sociology and anthropology are highly self-reflexive disciplines. Their own contested histories have been taught and critiqued as a matter of course in the majority of sociology and anthropology departments in the US and Europe since their inception—hardly a surprise, given how dense, kaleidoscopic, and political they are. Meanwhile, the philosophy of social science has been gaining popularity in philosophy departments, apparently independently of the centuries-old reflection on social scientific methodologies that can be found within sociological and anthropological texts. In true interdisciplinary fashion, this course seeks to marry these areas of scholarship, bringing together readings in philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and classical social theory, under the common themes that unite (and divide) them. We will cover debates on the epistemological priority of the individual or of society, the priority of naturalist or humanist perspectives, and the generalisability or spatio-temporal specificity of social scientific explanations.
Instructor(s): Parysa Mostajir Terms Offered: Autumn. Autumn 2018
Equivalent Course(s): HIPS 29630

KNOW 35000. Winckelmann: Enlightenment Art Historian and Philosopher. 100 Units.
We approach the first great modern art historian through reading his classic early and mature writings and through the art and criticism of his time (and at the end, our own). Reading-intensive, with a field trip to the Art Institute.
Instructor(s): Andrei Pop Terms Offered: Autumn
Prerequisite(s): German reading competence helpful, but NOT required.
Equivalent Course(s): GRMN 25015, GRMN 35015, CLAS 35014, ARTH 25115, ARTH 35115, SCTH 35000
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.