

FROM PYTHAGORAS TO GOOGLE: SOCIAL HISTORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

Spring Semester

orotlevy@gmail.com

Office Hours: By appointment

Short description:

In our age, that of "the knowledge society", we tend to think of knowledge as being on the web, in a network, rather than merely in the minds of individuals. Yet even before the invention of internet, sociologists and historians used the metaphor of a network to describe the development of knowledge as a result of interactions and transmissions between agents such as institutions, human-beings, and even objects. This provides us with a history that is very different from a still popular conception of the history of knowledge, and specifically of scientific knowledge. It is not a story of individual geniuses such as Aristotle or Newton, but rather a history of knowledge as social. This course will be dedicated to the social factors in the history of knowledge. We will examine several stations in this history, moving from mathematical knowledge in Ancient Greece to the revolution in astronomical knowledge in the Renaissance, from medieval institutions of learning Islamic law to the Scholastics in European universities, from hospitals and prisons in 18th century France to Facebook and Google. Thus, the course reveals a history of communities of knowledge, of traditions and multiple revolutions, of habituating and disciplining agents of knowledge, and of the migration of knowledge between continents, cultures and disciplines.

Assessment*:

Minor assignments:

10 brief responses to the readings (3 sentences; total of 10% of final grade)

Midterm:

Short paper (2 pages long; 10 % of the grade).

Final requirement:

Final paper (6 pages long; 70% of the final grade)

Participation:

In class or on the Q&A forum on the website - 10% of the final grade

* Please note that if distance learning is required, the assessment procedure, modes of assessment and weightings may be changed.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.