SOCI 532: Science, Technology, Politics

Department of Sociology, Spring 2013
Dan Lainer-Vos, lainer-vos@usc.edu
Class: Thursday 2:00-5:00, Sociology Seminar Room (HSH, second floor)
Office Hours: Wednesday 3:20-5:00 or by appointment (HSH 207)

Course Description and Objectives

This course provides an introduction to Science and Technology Studies (STS). STS is a rapidly growing and increasingly influential subfield that spans across the social sciences and the humanities. Methodological and substantive innovations from STS invigorate diverse subfields such as economic sociology, gender studies, political sociology, race and ethnicity, to name just a few.

STS explores the complex interaction between science, technology and society. Instead of asking whether particular scientific claims are true or false, or whether science is good or bad, STS researchers study how social, political, cultural, and material conditions shape scientific work and how science, in turn, shapes society. On the one hand, STS researchers explore the process through which scientists, and their allies, make facts. On the other hand, STS scholars examine how the facts and artifacts produced by scientists affect our life: how scientific knowledge changes our self-perception and how it affects social relations. Investigations along these lines call for a radical rethinking of the concept of “social construction” that is relevant for researchers in diverse fields.

This seminar will be concerned not only with scientists and their work but trace the development of the field and how it affects adjacent subfields. In the first part of the seminar, we will explore questions pertaining to the specificity of science as a social institution: the nature of scientific facts, the autonomy of the scientific field, and the possibility of objective inquiry. This part will help us understand the unique status of scientific facts, in comparison with other (religious, political, popular) truth claims. Equipped with a better understanding of the process of fact-making, the second part of the seminar focuses on studies that branch out of STS and influence other disciplines in the social sciences. The topics that we will explore in this half of the seminar include: human cognition, materiality and agency, expert knowledge and state building, economics and the shaping of the economy, simulations and war-making, race and ethnicity, and the production of kinds of people.

Requirements and Expectations

Seminars work best when people are interested and are confident that they can speak up and contribute to a discussion. I take it for granted that you are interested in (at least most of) the topics we cover and expect that you attend each meeting, read the relevant material in advance, and participate actively in discussions. I will do my best to catalyze
discussions, clarify obscure and ambiguous points when needed, and sometimes flesh out links between readings and across fields.

In addition to attendance, reading and participation, you will be required to complete the following tasks:

1) Each week, after the second, one student will be required to prepare a brief memo. The memo should include quick overview of the themes covered in the readings and identify key concepts. In addition, the memo will include a list of outstanding questions for discussion. These memos will be emailed to the rest of the class by noon of Wednesday before we meet and serve as a basis for our discussion.

2) A final paper for this class which can take different forms. One option is to write a brief research paper. This option is relevant if you have some prior acquaintance with the field and, perhaps, an idea for study. Alternatively, you can write a research proposal or a grant application that will serve as a starting point for research beyond this seminar. Finally, you can also submit an analytical literature review that explores particular topic of interest to you (in a way that makes a meaningful connection to the materials we study). Either way, the goal of the final paper is to advance your studies. So, please consult me early on in the semester, and we will find the best way to advance your research. In the final meeting of the semester, you will present your work to the rest of the class.

The materials covered in this course are not easy and developing a research proposal on materials that you just now encounter is a daunting task. Please use my office hours as frequently as possible so that together we can make it happen.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further
review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: [http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/).

### Readings

There are 6 required books for the course:


Other readings are available online either on JSTOR or on blackboard.

* Indicates required readings. The other items are recommended.

### Course outline and readings

**Week 1** – January 17: Introduction—what is science and technology studies, why is it relevant for sociologists?

**Part I. Mapping Science and Technology studies**

**Week 2** – January 24: Prehistory of science studies


**Week 3** – January 31: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions


**Week 4** – February 7: The Sociology of scientific knowledge (Edinburgh School)


**Week 5** – February 14: Feminist Critique of Science


**Week 6** – February 21: Actor-Network Theory


**Week 7 – February 28: Incommensurability, Translation, and Cooperation in Science**


**Note:** research proposal is due in class.

**Part II: STS in the Wild**

**Week 8** – March 7: Distributed Cognition and Situated Action


**Week 9** – March 14: Rule of Experts: Science and Sovereign Action


**Week 10** – Spring Recess: no Class

**Week 11** – March 28: Delivering the Economy: Performativity and its limits


**Week 12** – April 4: Economics and the making of Global Markets


**Week 13** – April 11: Simulations, Medicine, and War Making

* Lenoir, Tim. 2000. “All but war is a simulation.” Configurations 8, 289-335.


**Week 14** – April 18: Making up people I.


**Week 15** – April 25: Making Up People II:


**Week 16** – April 25: Final presentations