Syllabus for the Course

16:194:696 SPECIAL TOPICS (LIS) (3)
SEMINAR IN COMPARATIVE EPISTEMOLOGIES AND THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

Professor Marija Dalbello
SCILS – Rutgers University

I. Description

The seminar will examine theories of knowledge production and institutionalization with a particular focus on the methodology and theory for the study of social change and social memory institutions (libraries, archives, museums). It will present and critique constructivist and realist paradigms in science and technology and case studies of emergent socio-technical systems such as digital libraries, and the new media environments and scholarly communication.

II. Pre- and/or Co-requisite

None

III. Course Objectives

- Contrasting and comparison of positivist and post-positivist approaches, as well as historical approaches to social inquiry
- Understanding and application of comparative (social) epistemologies for research and applied contexts in LIS
- Examining ‘case’ approach and connection to implicit theories of knowledge including absolutism, pragmatism, realism and feminist theories and their application in the scientific and humanistic inquiry of socio-technical phenomena
- Understanding of cross-disciplinary approaches and ability to work in inter-disciplinary teams in conceptualization and evaluation projects

IV. Organization of the Course

Module I – Theories of Knowledge

1. Knowledge and the Epistemology Paradox
2. Cultural / Social Construction of Reality
3. Theories of Knowledge: An Overview
4. Positivist Epistemologies
5. Critiques of Positivism
6. Non-Positivist Epistemologies: Social Constructivism
7. Epistemological Breaks in Science & Technology
8. Social Constructivism: Applications in LIS
9. Social Epistemology: Applications in LIS

Module II – Knowledge as Social Action

1. Applied Social Science (The Praxis Approach)
2. Social Worlds / Situated Knowledge

Module III – Epistemologies & Methodologies

1. Interpretation
2. Narrative
3. Ethnographies & Histories

Major Assignments

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Pollock, John L. and Joseph Cruz. 1999. Contemporary Theories of Knowledge. 2nd ed. (Rowman and Littlefield)


ADDITIONAL TEXTS:


VI. Methods of Assessment

Position Papers (critical commentary of readings) 15% of final grade
Class Participation and Discussion 25% of final grade
Term Paper 60% of final grade
VII. Course Readings


Latour, Bruno.1993. We Have Never Been Modern. (Harvard U P)


Olick, Jeffrey K, and Joyce Robbins. 1998. “Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective
Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," Annual Review of
Sociology 24 (1998): 105-140.

Panofsky, Erwin. 1957. "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline." In Meaning in
the Visual Arts. pp. 1-25. (Doubleday)

Expanded Social Scientists Bestiary, pp.157-168, 187-207. (Rowman and Littlefield)


(Rowman and Littlefield)


Publishers)

Schwandt, Thomas A. “Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry.” In
Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln. (Sage)

Smith, Dorothy E. 1999. “From a Women's Standpoint to a Sociology for People.” In
P)

Company)

Libraries.” (http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/~vanhouse/bridge.html; accessed April 24,
2004)

(Cambridge University Press)

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OF KNOWLEDGE:

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Office hours: Tuesdays 12-2 // Thursdays 12-2

Class time: Thursdays, 3:20-6:00
CIL 301

Course website:
http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~dalbello/courses/696/696f2004home.html

Readings:
Some of the readings will be distributed in class. Students will obtain other readings
independently.

Week 1  Sept. 2  Introduction to the class
Overview of Course and Requirements

Module I – Theories of Knowledge

Week 2  Sept. 9  Knowledge and the Epistemology Paradox
Cultural / Social Construction of Reality

DISCUSSION: Schwanzl, Berger, pp. 1-46, Geertz

Week 3  Sept. 16  Theories of Knowledge: An Overview

DISCUSSION: Pollock & Cruz, Contemporary Theories
(Ch. 1-4)

Week 4  Sept. 23  Positivist Epistemologies

DISCUSSION: (cont.) Pollock & Cruz, Contemporary Theories
(Ch. 5-7)

Phillips, Bitbol, Kircher, Miller

Week 5  Sept. 30  Critiques of Positivism

PRESENTATION: Haraway, Modest Witness

Critical assessment of readings due (presenter)
Week 6  Oct. 7  Non-Positivist Epistemologies: Social Constructivism
PRESENTATION: Latour, Laboratory Life
Critical assessment of readings due (presenter)

Week 7  Oct. 14  Epistemological Breaks in Science & Technology
PRESENTATION: Bijker, Of Bicycles, Bulbs
Critical assessment of readings due (presenter)

Week 8  Oct. 21  Social Constructivism: Applications in LIS
DISCUSSION: Van House, Frohmann, Benoit

Week 9  Oct. 28  Social Epistemology
DISCUSSION: Budd or Goldman

Module II – Knowledge as Social Action
Week 10  Nov. 4  Applied Social Science (The Praxis Approach)
DISCUSSION: Feagin & Vera, Liberation Sociology

Week 11  Nov. 11  Social Worlds / Situated Knowledge
PRESENTATION: Goldman, Knowledge in a Social World
Critical assessment of readings due (presenter)

DISCUSSION: (cont.) Liberation Sociology, Butler, Smith

Module III – Epistemologies & Methodologies
Week 12  Nov. 18  Interpretation
DISCUSSION: Panofsky

Nov. 25  Thanksgiving - no class

Week 13  Dec. 2  Narrative
DISCUSSION: Kreiswirth

Week 14  Dec. 9  Ethnographies & Histories
DISCUSSION: Erickson, Olick

Week 15  Dec. 16  Project due

Selected Background Readings:
These readings include your weekly assigned readings and other titles that will be useful to you in preparing your assignments and further reading.

Weekly Assigned Readings:

Week 2: Knowledge and the Epistemology Paradox: Cultural / Social Construction of Reality


Week 5: Theories of Knowledge: An Overview
Pollock, John L. and Joseph Cruz. 1999. Contemporary Theories of Knowledge. 2nd ed. (Rowman and Littlefield)

Week 4: Positivist Epistemologies


Week 5: Critiques of Positivism


Week 6: Non-Positivist Epistemologies: Social Constructivism


Week 7: Epistemological Breaks in Science & Technology


Week 8: Social Constructivism: Applications in LIS


Week 9: Social Epistemology: Applications in LIS


Week 10: Applied Social Science (The Praxis Approach)


Week 11: Social Worlds / Situated Knowledge


Week 12: Interpretation


Week 13: Narrative


Week 14: Ethnographies & Histories


Additional Titles of Interest


Latour, Bruno.1993. We Have Never Been Modern. (Harvard U P)


