The Political Sociology of Science
Sociology/ Rural Sociology 927
Spring 2008

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Office Hours: By appointment
Class meeting: Mondays, 2:25-5:25

Broadly speaking, the arc of the sociology of science has gone from the functionalism of Robert K. Merton to a set of micro-studies and other post-structuralist inflected scholarship interested first and foremost with epistemological questions. Recent years have seen the fragmentation of the field and the emergence of an array of creative approaches to science in the (post) modern world. This course focuses on one developing cluster of work that uses the tools of political and organizational sociology to understand recent developments in technoscience. More than some recent work on science and technology, this scholarship contends with classical sociological problems of economic and political power and social inequality, seeking to understand how and why science works better for some people than for others. In this seminar, we will spend the bulk of the semester reading and discussing this scholarship.

Requirements

Initiating class discussion once (10% of course grade) (This requirement is negotiable. We might collectively decide to simply have whoever has something to say start discussion or decide that I should initiate discussion every week.)

Weekly comment papers--2-3 double-spaced typed pages (30% of course grade)

1 essay--15-20 double spaced typed pages (60% of course grade)

Class Discussion: This is a seminar course. I will not lecture during the semester; I will, however, moderate discussion and contribute my interpretations and views of the texts we read. Where necessary and appropriate, I will, of course, provide background or context for readings. Generally, however, my sense is that graduate students learn more from talking through arguments—looking for virtues as well as difficulties in texts—than by being lectured at. Each week, students should come to class prepared to make at least one comment about the reading. With luck, this will be an observation that will promote vigorous debate. Unless we decide otherwise collectively, at the beginning of the semester, each student will sign up for one (or more) session(s) for which s/he agrees to get the discussion going.
Readings: The books listed on the course schedule and marked with an asterisk are available for purchase at Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative (426 W. Gilman, 257-6050). Virtually all of the required books are on reserve at Helen C. White. I will place the shorter readings on electronic reserve, and they will be available as a packet for purchase at the Social Science Copy Center in the Social Sciences Building (room 6120; 262-5396).

Comment Papers: These papers are opportunities to probe course reading. Each paper should show that you are seriously grappling with the material; however, how you proceed is entirely up to you. You might compare readings from a given week with a reading or readings from an earlier week. You might consider how an argument made in a course reading could be applied to your own work. You might assess the reading, suggesting strengths and weaknesses in argument and evidence.

You must write nine of these papers over the course of the semester. Papers should be submitted to the class list (rursoc927-1-s08@lists.wisc.edu). In order for class participants to read each others comments prior to class, it would be best if these were submitted by Sunday evening.

Longer Essay-As with the comment papers, how you proceed on this assignment is up to you. An original research paper will be appropriate for some of you. Others might prefer to write a paper that critically engages a sampling of the literature on one of the topics we cover during the semester, and still other students may wish to write a polemical essay on a topic related in some fashion to the course. This should be a serious paper, and you should get started on it early. Abstracts with bibliographies, outlines, and drafts should be submitted prior to the final paper. I expect as students proceed with their papers we will find class time to exchange ideas and discuss each other's work.

–Abstracts with bibliographies due: March 3.
–Outlines due: April 7.
–FINAL PAPERS DUE (IN MY BOX): BY 4 P.M. ON MAY 10TH. Late papers will not be accepted without prior permission.

Predecessors
January 28


**Concepts**

February 4


**Science, Industry, and the Knowledge Economy**

February 11


February 18


February 25


**Science, State Building, and Public Policy**
March 3

March 10


**Science and the Regulatory State**
March 24


**Science and Social Movements**
March 31


April 7

**Disciplines and Interdisciplines**

April 14


April 21

**Counter-Expertise and Participatory Science**

April 28

May 5.