Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge

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**Faculty Members**

- Clifford Ando, David B. and Clara E. Stern Professor; Professor of Classics, History and Law
- Shadi Bartsch-Zimmer, Helen A. Regenstein Distinguished Service Professor of Classics and the Program in Gender Studies
- Claudia Brittenham, Associate Professor of Art History
- Karin Knorr Cetina, Otto Borchert Distinguished Service Professor of Anthropology and Sociology and Chair of the Department of Sociology
- Simeon Chavel, Assistant Professor of the Hebrew Bible, Divinity School
- Whitney Cox, Associate Professor of South Asian Languages and Civilizations
- Arnold Davidson, Robert O. Anderson Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Philosophy, the Department of Comparative Literature, the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, the Committee on the Conceptual and Historical Studies of Science, and the Divinity School
- Ahmed El-Shamsy, Assistant Professor, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations
- Jas' Elsner, Visiting Professor of Art History, and Humfrey Payne Senior Research Fellow in Classical Archaeology and Art, Oxford University
- Jack Gilbert, Associate Professor Ecology & Evolution, Evolutionary Biology
- Tom Ginsburg, Leo Spitz Professor of International Law, Ludwig and Hilde Wolf Research Scholar, and Professor of Political Science
- Andreas Glaeser, Professor of Sociology
The Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge opened in the Fall of 2015 at the University of Chicago. It was founded with the mission of uniting 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.

The Institute’s Faculty and External Faculty Board 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 visiting Fellows at every stage of the career, 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.

Website

sifk.uchicago.edu

Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge Courses

KNOW 23003 01. Politics and the Sacred: Divinities, Essences, Order. 100 Units.
Politics is replete with references to phenomena that are themselves imagined to lie beyond political inference. Four such phenomena that are imagined as absolutes stand out in the making of the Europeanoid world: 1. the idea of a single all-knowing, all-powerful creator god; 2. the idea that the world as it appears to us is grounded in unchanging essences; 3. the idea that there can be a sovereign power that has the final and undisputable say in all matters political; and 4. the idea that like the material world human affairs are governed by unchanging laws which can be systematically exploited for creating a better social order. This course looks at the historical context in which these ideas have both emerged (or re-emerged) and found lastingly impactful formulations in the Hebrew Bible, Plato’s Philosophy, the works of Bodin and Hobbes, as well as in the works of Comte and Marx. It also explores the reasons and theorizes why references to absolutes appear to be so appealing to politicians.
Instructor(s): A. Glaeser Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): SOCI 20267
**KNOW 31403. Censorship from the Inquisition to the Present. 100 Units.**
Collaborative research seminar on the history of censorship and information control, with a focus on the history of books and information technologies. The class will meet in Special Collections, and students will work with the professor to prepare an exhibit, *The History of Censorship*, to be held in the Special Collections exhibit space in the spring. Students will work with rare books and archival materials, design exhibit cases, write exhibit labels, and contribute to the exhibit catalog. Half the course will focus on censorship in early modern Europe, including the Inquisition, the spread of the printing press, and clandestine literature in the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Special focus on the effects of censorship on classical literature, both newly rediscovered works like Lucretius and lost books of Plato, and authors like Pliny the Elder and Seneca who had been available in the Middle Ages but became newly controversial in the Renaissance. The other half of the course will look at modern and contemporary censorship issues, from wartime censorship, to the censorship of comic books, to digital-rights management, to free speech on our own campus. Students may choose whether to focus their own research and exhibit cases on classical, early modern, modern, or contemporary censorship. *This course is part of the College Course Cluster, The Renaissance.*
Instructor(s): A. Palmer & S. McManus Terms Offered: Autumn
Prerequisite(s): Admission by consent of instructor
Equivalent Course(s): CLCV 25417, CLAS 35417, HIST 35421, HIPS 25421, CHSS 35421, KNOW 21403, RLST 22121, HREL 34309, SIGN 26010, HIST 25421

**KNOW 31404. History of Perception. 100 Units.**
Knowing time. Feeling space. Smelling. Seeing. Touching. Tasting. Hearing. Are these universal aspects of human consciousness, or particular experiences contingent upon time, place, and culture? How do we come to know about our own perceptions and those of others? This course examines these and related questions through detailed readings of primary sources, engagement in secondary scholarship in the history and anthropology of sensation, and through close work with participants' own sensations and perceptions of the world around them.
Instructor(s): M. Rossi Terms Offered: Winter
Prerequisite(s): Upper-level undergraduate
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 35309, HIPS 25309, CHSS 35309, KNOW 21404, ANTH 24308, ANTH 34308, HIST 25309
KNOW 31406. History of Skepticism. 100 Units.
Before we ask what is true or false, we must ask how we can know what is true or false. This course examines the vital role doubt and philosophical skepticism have played in the Western intellectual tradition, from pre-Socratic Greece through the Enlightenment, with a focus on how Criteria of Truth—what kinds of arguments are considered legitimate sources of certainty—have changed over time. The course will examine dialog between skeptical and dogmatic thinkers, and how many of the most fertile systems in the history of philosophy have been hybrid systems which divided the world into things which can be known, and things which cannot. The course will touch on the history of atheism, heresy and free thought, on fideism and skeptical religion, and will examine how the Scientific Method is itself a form of philosophical skepticism. Primary source readings will include Plato, Sextus Empiricus, Lucretius, Ockham, Pierre Bayle, Montaigne, Descartes, Francis Bacon, Hobbes, Voltaire, Diderot, and others.
Instructor(s): A. Palmer Terms Offered: Winter
Note(s): No prerequisites; first-year students welcome.
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 39516,CLCV 28517,CLAS 38517,HIPS 29516,CHSS 39516,KNOW 21406,RLST 22123,HREL 39516,SIGN 26011,HIST 29516

KNOW 40201. Reason and Religion. 100 Units.
The quarrel between reason and faith has a long history. The birth of Christianity was in the crucible of rationality. The ancient Greeks privileged this human capacity above all others, finding in reason the quality wherein man was closest to the gods, while the early Christians found this viewpoint antithetical to religious humility. As religion and its place in society have evolved throughout history, so have the standing of, and philosophical justification for, non-belief on rational grounds. This course will examine the intellectual and cultural history of arguments against religion in Western thought from antiquity to the present. Along the way, of course, we will also examine the assumptions bound up in the binary terms "religion" and "reason."
Instructor(s): Shadi Bartsch and Robert Richards Terms Offered: Winter
Prerequisite(s): Consent required: Email sbartsch@uchicago.edu a few sentences describing your background and what you hope to get out of this seminar.
Equivalent Course(s): DVPR 46616,CLAS 46616,CHSS 40201,HIST 66606

KNOW 40302. Islam and Modern Science. 100 Units.
Since the nineteenth century, the rise of the modern empirical sciences has provided both challenges and opportunities for Muslim-majority societies. In this seminar, we examine the epistemological, institutional, and biopolitical transformations that have come about in these societies through encounters with a range of natural and social scientific disciplines (astronomy, medicine, psychology, psychical research, psychoanalysis, eugenics, economics, sociology, anthropology, and others). Readings are from anthropology, history, and science studies.
Instructor(s): Alireza Doostdar Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): AASR 40302,ISLM 40302
KNOW 47002. Philosophy of Judaism: Soloveitchik Reads the Classics. 100 Units.
Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was one of the most important philosophers of Judaism in
the twentieth century. Among his many books, essays and lectures, we find a detailed
engagement with the Bible, the Talmud and the fundamental works of Maimonides. This
course will examine Soloveitchik’s philosophical readings and appropriation of Torah,
Talmud, and both the Guide and the Mishneh Torah. A framing question of the course will
be: how can one combine traditional Jewish learning and modern philosophical ideas? What
can Judaism gain from philosophy? What can philosophy learn from Judaism?
Instructor(s): A. Davidson Terms Offered: Winter
Note(s): All students interested in enrolling in this course should send an application to
jbarbaro@uchicago.edu by 12/15/2017. Applications should be no longer than one page
and should include name, email address, phone number, and department or committee.
Applicants should briefly describe their background and explain their interest in, and their
reasons for applying to, this course.
Equivalent Course(s): HIJD 53360, DVPR 53360, PHIL 53360

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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.