IS 289, Doctoral Seminar on Information as Evidence,  
Fall 2005

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Course homepage: http://polaris.gseis.ucla.edu/blanchette/IS289/Fall2005/
Office hours: by appointment.

Themes

Through close readings of scholarly works, this course will explore how certain objects — e.g., records, books, statistics — acquire their particular role as evidence of historical events, authorial intention, social phenomena, collective trauma or joy.

We will pay special attention to the kind of interventions that must be staged so that these objects retain their evidential value while subjected to gradual decontextualization, physical degradation, and competition from contradictory evidence. We will thus understand information objects as dynamic entities, which must constantly be re-interpreted into the world, despite the traditional association of evidence and fixity.

Another important theme of the class will be that of the relationship between memory and oblivion, of the processes of selection and exclusion inherent to archival practice. Rather than understanding oblivion as a failure of memory, we will try to examine ways it could be considered a felicitous outcome of archival practice.

Evaluation

— Weekly write-ups and class participation: 40%
Each week, participants must bring to class a 500-750 words report of the assigned reading, summarizing and discussing one or several of its arguments. Enough copies of the report should be provided for all other participants. The reports will form the basis for the class discussion.

— 4S field trip: 15%
We will be having a field trip to The Society for the Social Studies of Science (4S) Annual Meeting, which will be held at the Hilton Pasadena, from October 20-22. More information can be found at http://www.4sconference.org/, and the program is available at: http://www.4sconference.org/program.html. Programs (including abstracts) of past conferences can be found at http://www.4sconference.org/archives.html (for 2003) and
http://www.4sonline.org/paris04_archive.htm (for 2004). The total cost of student registration for the conference (including a one-year membership in 4S and 4 issues of *Science, Technology and Human Values*) is 97$.

Assignment to be announced.

— **Book review, 15%**
Write an approx. 800-words review of one of the assigned books. The review can be turned in at any time in the semester. For examples of guidelines, see the *American Historical Review*, http://historycooperative.org/ahr/guidebkrv.html

— **Thought piece on “Information as Evidence”: 30%**
Using the write-ups and the books discussed in class, write an approx. 4000 words thought piece. It is due Week 11.

**Required readings**

All required readings should be on sale in the bookstore (or available in the reserve), but most of them can be gotten more cheaply from used bookstores on the Internet, such as Addall, Amazon, or Powells. I’ve indicated Amazon’s price with each book.


Class schedule

Week 1 (October 5th): How much history?

Discussion: Nietzsche

Week 2 (October 12th): Medieval print culture

Discussion: Clanchy

Week 3 (October 19th): no class, 4S field trip

Week 4 (October 26th): Data

4S assignment due.

Discussion: Hacking

Week 5 (November 2nd): no class, ASIST

Week 6 (November 9th): Oblivion

Discussion: Ricoeur

Week 7 (November 16th): Trauma

Discussion: Felman

Week 8 (November 23th): Writing

Discussion: Derrida

Week 9 (November 30th): Professional practices

Discussion: Phillips

Week 10 (December 7th): Modern print culture (I)

Discussion: Johns, chap. 1-4
Week 11 (December 14th): Modern print culture (II)

Discussion: Johns, chap. 5-9