Boundaries of Knowledge in the European Context
Professor Michael Gordin
Tuesdays 9-11:50am, Dickinson 211
Fall Semester 2010

Course Description:
Establishment of claims for authority — political, legal, cultural — has been a touchstone theme for European history. This seminar explores how those claims for authority are adjudicated and established at the margins of the most prestigious mode of authority of all: the epistemic. Moving chronologically from the Renaissance to the 1990s across a variety of European contexts, this course examines a series of episodes in which the boundaries of knowledge were hotly disputed, thus providing a new perspective on some old tropes of European history (secularization, professionalization, liberalization, and so on). Instead of a typical history of science approach — which asks what European historians can tell us about the context for episodes like astrology, alchemy, eugenics, and science under totalitarian regimes — this course inverts the dynamic and investigates what these episodes can tell us about the historical evolution of authority in Europe.

Assignments:
Active participation in seminar discussions is required. Students are also expected to produce an original written paper (due on Dean’s Date, 11 January 2011 (11/1/11!); absolutely no incompletes) meeting one of the following categories:
   a) an original research paper structured around a case study, either one of those discussed in the course or an alternative which is cleared with the instructor in advance;
   b) a critical historiographical essay on one of these case studies (or an alternative approved by the instructor);
   c) a dissertation proposal outlining a full-length research project framed around the questions and approaches developed in this course. As with all dissertation proposals, this must contain a discussion of the existing literature and available archives and sources, as well as a thorough explanation of the value of the study and the benefits of the proposed approach. (This does not have to be your actual proposal, and there is no expectation that you will actually select this as your dissertation topic.)

Assigned Books (also on reserve in History Graduate Study Room, C-floor of Firestone):


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**Schedule of Meetings**

**Meeting 1, 21 September: Introduction**

**Meeting 2, 28 September: Astrology**

Harkness, *The Jewel House*.

Grafton, *Cardano’s Cosmos*.

Kocku von Stuckrad, “*Astrologia Hermetica*: Astrology, Western Culture, and the Academy,” in Wouter J. Hanegraaf and Joyce Pijnenburg, eds., *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years’
Meeting 3, 5 October: Alchemy
Smith, The Business of Alchemy.
Newman and Principe, Alchemy Tried in the Fire.

Meeting 4, 12 October: Mesmerism
Darnton, Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France.
Winter, Mesmerized.

Meeting 5, 19 October: Racial Science
Stocking, Victorian Anthropology.
Horn, The Criminal Body.

Meeting 6, 26 October: Spiritualism
Treitel, A Science for the Soul.
Owen, A Place of Enchantment.

Meeting 7, 9 November: Eugenics
Richardson, Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century.
Turda and Weindling, Blood and Homeland.

Meeting 8, 16 November: Nazi Science
Walker, Nazi Science.
Proctor, The Nazi War on Cancer.

* All readings aside from the books are available for electronic download on the course’s Blackboard site.
Meeting 9, 23 November: Lysenkoism
Krementsov, *Stalinist Science*.

Meeting 10, 30 November: Von Däniken
Von Däniken, *Chariots of the Gods*.

Meeting 11, 7 December: Green Politics and Anti-Scientism
Margit and Ely, *The German Greens*.
Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism*.

Meeting 12, 14 November: Demarcation
Feyerabend, *Against Method*.