



Graduate Seminar

Department of History

**HIST 6700**

# Global Intellectual History and the Early Modern World

Spring 2023

Monday 3:30pm – 6:30pm

Instructor:

Prof. Oscar Aguirre-Mandujano

Department of History

[oscaragm@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:oscaragm@sas.upenn.edu)

## Course Description

One of the pioneering intellectual historians of the twentieth century, John Pocock, was once asked, “Why were you initially drawn to intellectual history?” Pocock answered that he was not sure he ever was. He said: “I had never heard of [intellectual history] at that time, and I am not sure that I believe in it now.” (Whatmore, 2015) Pocock did not necessarily see intellectual history as a distinct field of historical studies, but more as a series of methods and practices that best suited the questions and historical problems at hand. In recent years, intellectual history has turned into the study of how people used to think, either individually or collectively. The field thus escapes a narrower identification of intellectual history as the history of political thought alone. The intellectual past has remained at the center of most historiographical discussions, either as the history of ideas, the biography of thinkers and scholars or as an approach to sources that allows historians to interpret the archive.

Historians have also begun to question who can be considered an intellectual, expanding the definition beyond traditional professions of the mind, such as philosophers, scientists, or scholars to include sailors, shopkeepers, craftsmen and others. Consequently, scholars have had to reconsider the nature of the sources for intellectual history, as well as where we look for intellectual exchanges and innovation. This has led to a shift from the individual into the collective, to the study of social groups (bureaucrats, scholars, jurists, poets), not by abandoning the close reading of specific intellectual works but by rereading them side by side with other contemporary works, by seeing them as part of larger network of ideas, thoughts, and maybe more importantly, people. There has also been a move from the local to the global, with an emphasis on the connections, exchanges, and parallels across empires in Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas. Indeed, the place of intellectual history and its overlapping boundaries with social, cultural and material history remains both undeniable and elusive. And yet, one would hope to see the lessons of philology and the depth of intellectual biographies remain as core methods in historical research.

This seminar focuses on recent works on intellectual history of the early modern world, with a focus on method, archives, and sources; it also revisits assumptions of an interconnected globe in the medieval and premodern ages. By the end of the course, students will be able to identify and discuss major currents of change in the field of intellectual history. The student will have a better understanding of the parallels and differences as well as the challenges that scholars face as they write intellectual histories in both the local and the global contexts.

The course is divided in four sections. The first section introduces the student to major debates about intellectual history, history of ideas, and conceptual history. The second section focuses on recent examples of intellectual history of various places across the world. The third section considers the recent emphasis on the global in scholarship and analyses the limits of this approach to intellectual history in the context of the early modern world. The fourth and final section investigates the themes that have inspired parallel works of intellectual history in different parts of the world, including the turn to the vernacular, the social role of gossip, and formation of intellectual/interpretative communities.

## Grading:

Regular attendance of all classes and careful preparation of readings is vital for success in the course. Assignments and grading percentages are as follows:

|                       |          |                              |
|-----------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| Short Assignments     | 10% each | Weeks 5, 8, 15               |
| Draft and Final Paper | 40%      | Week 10 and Examination Week |
| Participation**       | 30%      | Every Week                   |

\*\*Participation is graded in a scale from 0 to 10. A minimum of 6 is required to pass the course.

## Assignments

1. Three short assignments in the form of a book review, a primary source discussion, and short review article.
2. The final paper must be an original contribution. Topic should be selected in consultation with the instructor. Paper should not exceed 25 pages, Times New Roman, 12 pts, double space, standard margins. Minimum length 20 pages. For the final paper, in addition to sources read in class, the student should incorporate primary and secondary sources relevant to the selected topic. The student should connect their topic with readings done in class. A paper draft should be at least 10 pages of presentable prose with footnotes. It should include a preliminary bibliography.

## Course Policies

Plagiarism and cheating: You should abide by the University's code of integrity. Failure to comply with the rules of academic integrity will result in failure for this course and the appropriate disciplinary actions. For the University's Code of Academic Integrity see <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>

Attendance: Participation is graded every week. Attendance and participation is crucial to success in this course. More than 3 consecutive absences may result in failing this class.

Computers and other devices: Computers are not allowed in class. Please bring hard copies of the readings. Under certain circumstances, tablets can be used instead of hard copies, if the student uses the tablet for class purposes only and in consultation with the instructor. Phones are not allowed under any circumstances. The use of any device in the classroom will be considered as an absence for the class in which the student uses it.

Late submissions: Every student has the right to submit 1 assignment up to 5 days late without penalty. Students DO NOT NEED to use this right. It exists to account for unexpected situations. When using this right, students need not to give explanations, however, the student must inform the instructor by email that the student is using the one-time late submission right. This right DOES NOT apply to exams. **Other late submissions won't be accepted.**