

STS 502 / PHIL 561: Topics in Science and Technology Studies
Expertise and Ignorance

Winter 2019 – Term 2

Instructor: Professor Alison Wylie

Class meetings: Mondays, 2:00 – 5:00 pm

Office hours: weekly hours TBD and by appointment: alison.wylie@ubc.ca

Course website: TBD

Having leveled the playing field, demonstrating that science is an inescapably social enterprise, a growing number of science studies scholars have expressed alarm that the pendulum of constructionist critique has swung too far. Scientific knowledge shouldn't be presumed authoritative because it transcends the contexts of its production; a principle of symmetry demands that the accomplishments of the sciences, as well as their failures, be explained in terms of social dynamics and cultures of practice. But neither should scientific expertise and its products be reduced to wishful thinking and the political machinations of *Merchants of Doubt* who deliberately undermine confidence in our best, most credible science – about climate change, for example. The focal question for this seminar is: how do we move beyond the impasse created by constructionist arguments that seem to entail a paralyzing relativism?

We'll start with a selection of classic essays by dominant figures in science studies, like Latour, and Collins and Evans, who address this question in terms of challenges to claims of expertise. We then turn to consider the range of different types of "ignorance" investigated by contributors to a recent literature on "agnotology" (the study of ignorance); readings here will include selections from Proctor's *Agnotology* (2008), Tuana's 2006 special issue of *Hypatia* on "the epistemology of ignorance," and the 2017 Routledge *Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. In the final section of the seminar we will explore recent work on expertise, with a focus on "interactional" and cross-field expertise as characterized in the collection edited by Collins, Evans and Gorman, *Trading Zones and Interactional Expertise* (2010). We will close the term with readings on standpoint theory and collaborative practice. These illustrate how interactional expertise can be used to mobilize the epistemic resources of diversely situated knowers in a constructive response to the worries about corrosive relativism that provoked the "third wave" STS debate with which we started.

Format and requirements: this will be a reading-intensive course with the emphasis on seminar discussion. The requirements will include regular reading response posts, in-class presentations, and a research paper that addresses questions about ignorance and/or expertise as they arise in a particular controversy, case study, or field of interest.

Books on order (UBC Bookstore)

- Robert Proctor (ed), *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, Stanford UP, 2008
- Michael Gorman (ed.) *Trading Zones & Interactional Expertise*, MIT Press, 2010
- Naomi Oreskes, *Why Trust Science?* Princeton UP, 2019
- Ian Kidd, Jose Medina and Gail Pholhaus (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, Routledge, 2017