This seminar is an introduction to recent work in the history of science. We’ll be reading books and articles published within the last five years that cover science in Europe and the United States since the medieval era. We’ll confront several key historical questions: What is science? What is “modern” science? Where is the boundary between science and philosophy, technology, or politics? How does science intersect with government, gender, class, business, or law? But just as important, we’ll also be asking questions about how the history of science is written: What topics are interesting? What questions are worth asking? What kinds of evidence are convincing? What makes a book “important”?

No previous background in history of science is required. I’m happy to recommend sources for general overviews as needed, along with other supplementary material.

Assignments
There are three skills you’ll have to develop in this seminar: reading, talking, and writing. None of these are trivial. There’s enough reading every week that you’ll have to learn how to distill a large number of pages down to a few important arguments and pieces of evidence. In each of our class meetings, you’ll also have to speak with confidence and engage your classmates as peers. And you’ll practice three different genres of writing.

Every week, you’ll submit at most one page about each reading; this page should include one paragraph summarizing the argument, one paragraph explaining what (or who) the author is reacting against, one paragraph noting what (or who) the author is aligning themselves with, and one paragraph of possible critiques or unresolved problems. (You should also plan to write additional notes for your own benefit.)

A book review of any book published on the history of science in the last five years will be due on February 25th; you’ll have to get your book choice approved by February 11th. Please feel free to pick one of the books from the syllabus!

A review essay covering one of the week’s topics will be due at the end of reading period (May 1st). For this essay, you’ll need to situate recent work within a longer trajectory of historians grappling with the same topic. You should discuss five or six books published within the last five years (including the books on the syllabus), but you’ll have to do substantial reading of earlier work as well. This essay should be no longer than 5,000 words.

Your grade will be based on both your speaking and your writing.
SCHEDULE

All books should be available at the Yale Bookstore, but check www.bookfinder.com for the best prices. All articles and book chapters are available on the course website.

January 14: Introduction

PART I: WAYS OF KNOWING

January 18 (FRIDAY) – The Scientific Revolution

January 28 – Medieval Science
David J. Collins, “Albertus, Magnus or Magus? Magic, Natural Philosophy, and Religious Reform in the Late Middle Ages,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 63 (Spring 2010), pp. 1–44.

February 4 – Scientific Sight and Visual Evidence

February 11 – The Life Sciences since Darwin
– APPROVAL FOR BOOK REVIEW –

February 18 – The Physical Sciences since Einstein
PART II: SCIENCE AND POWER

February 25 – The Bomb and the Cold War
– BOOK REVIEW DUE –

March 4 – Corporate Science

– SPRING BREAK –

March 25 – Science and the Public

PART III: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND EVERYDAY LIFE

April 1 – Telecommunications and Computing

April 8 – Biotech

April 15 – Naturetech
PART IV: PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

April 22 – The Isis Focus Section

– REVIEW ESSAY DUE MAY 1st –