Course Description

Polyvalent phenomena like the weather reveal how modern technocratic societies use scientific and technical knowledge to manage the tightly coupled infrastructure necessary for industrial life on an increasingly crowded planet. Scholars have begun to approach the air from disciplinary perspectives as diverse as environmental history, cultural geography, sociology of science, and the history of medicine. In this graduate reading seminar, we will focus on the work of a cadre of rising scholars who have developed new insights into weather and meteorology, tackling topics like selling the weather, atmospheric science’s central role in the development of computing, and the politics of public prediction. We’ll also map a few of the storm fronts making their way across the historiography. As we are confronted with environmental crises like global warming and Hurricane Katrina, weather studies have become a barometer of the changing scholarly climate. In this class, you’ll learn how to untangle this metaphor.

Assignments

Book Reviews: In addition to reading and participating in class discussion, you will complete two or three reviews (800-1200 words) of works on the history of weather, climate, and meteorology not covered on the syllabus. Please follow the review format described by a major journal in our field (e.g. Isis, Social Studies of Science, Technology & Culture). I will provide a list of books available for review. One or two students will present their reviews each week, circulated to the class by email at least a day before we meet.

Final Paper: Book Proposal. There are a wealth of topics and unexplored sources for new social studies of the weather and atmospheric science. In the final paper, I’d like to know what topic and approach you’d find most interesting. Your task is to write a mock book proposal, describing the subject, the intellectual approach, and the kinds of sources/research you would use to develop the argument. You should also include what kinds of classes might assign this book for teaching purposes, and what existing books and scholarship bear on your topic.

Schedule and Readings

Week 1. Introductory discussion: Why current interest in the atmosphere?

Week 2. Foundational Scholar: Jim Fleming

Week 3. Foundational Scholar: Robert Marc Friedman
**Week 4. Vlad Jankovic’s Expansive Vision of Meteorology**


**Week 5. Jan Golinski’s Reply**
*The Climate of Enlightenment*, Jan Golinski (University of Chicago Press, 2007)

**Week 6. Conevery Bolton Valencius Integrates Popular Culture, Environmental History, and History of Medicine**

**Week 7. The Tensions of Public Prediction: Katey Anderson**

**Week 8. Debbie Coen on the generations of Austrian Climate Science**


**Week 9. Two Views of Computing the Atmosphere, Kris Harper and Paul Edwards**


**Week 10. “and now Erik Conway with the Weather from Space…”**


Week 12. Gary Fine explores the social dynamics of Weather Forecasting
*Authors of the Storm: Meteorologists and the Culture of Prediction*, Gary Alan Fine (University of Chicago Press, 2007)

Week 13. Weather as News: Views from Media Studies


Sample Books for Review


Collected Essays

*Intimate Universality: Local and Global Themes in the History of Weather and Climate*, James Rodger Fleming, Vladimir Jankovic, and Deborah Coen, eds. (Science History Publications, 2006)
