

Sidoli, Nathan Camillo
Spring, 2026
Office hours: Thursday, 4th and 5th

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SEMINAR ON MATTER AND INFORMATION: PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE (FOUCAULT)

Course Description

Science studies covers a broad range of topics in the history, philosophy and sociology of the sciences wherever and whenever they have been practiced. Because of this scope, there is great diversity in the styles of scholarship practiced and the views about science put forward by scholars in the field. For these reasons, this seminar will be based around a particular theme each term.

In the 2026 Spring Term, we will be studying topics in the philosophy of science , with a focus on the work of Michel Foucault and his influence.

Students are expected to do all of the readings, participate actively in classroom discussions, and write a final paper.

Required Texts

A number of papers and book chapters will be available for download from this site.

Grading:

Participation	50%
Final paper	50%

General Format

The class meets once a week for a seminar discussion. Attendance and participation in class are mandatory and graded. Each week, we will discuss a chapter or two from the text, and other topics of interest. Students are expected to do all the readings, participate actively in the discussions, submit a final paper and give an in class presentation on its contents.

Classroom Etiquette

Please follow basic rules of decorum – do not sleep, eat, or carry on individual conversations in class. Finally, DO NOT use mobile phones, smart phones, or laptops in class. (Unfortunately, a large percentage of students use their laptops to do unrelated things during class, and this distracts both them and everyone behind them.)

Final Paper

Writing project, 3,000-5,000 words.

This term the writing project will be a paper. Ideally, you should pick your topic early and do a lot of reading. You should come up with your own idea for a final project that is based on the work we are studying. The best kind of project will be on a subject in which you are personally interested.

The project will be done in three phases: (1) a topic proposal and preliminary bibliography, (2) an annotated bibliography (3) a final paper.

- (1) Start thinking about possible topics right away. Once you have selected a topic, you should write up a short description of project, followed by a short bibliography (two or three items).
- (2) You should begin to read your sources and take notes on them. Make a bibliographic list of at least ten sources, with a short blurb on each one.
- (3) Based on all this reading, write up your account of the historical events.

Please also read the general [guidelines](#) for written assignments.

Discussion Topics, Readings and Assignments

As you read through the readings, you should ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the overall point that the author is trying to make?
2. What is the author's argument? What evidence does the author use? What are the strong points of the argument, the weak points?
3. Is the argument convincing? Why, or why not?
4. Why would the author make this kind of argument? What is the broader context in which this is interesting?

Week 1: Apr 15

Introduction

Week 2: Apr 22

Foucault's teachers (Canguilhem): The normal and the pathological

- Reading: G. Canguilhem, Selections from *A Vital Rationalist*, "[The normal and the pathological](#)"

Week 3: Apr 29

Foucault I: The Concept of the "Episteme"

- Reading: M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, "[Preface](#)"

Holiday: May 6

No Class

- No reading.

Week 4: May 13

Foucault II: The Function of Discourses

- Reading: M. Foucault, "[The discourse on language](#)"

Week 5: May 20

Foucault III: The Medical Gaze

- Reading: M. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, Chap. 9, "[The visible Invisible](#)"

Week 6: May 27

Foucault IV: Biopolitics and Training

- Reading: M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Part III, Chap. 2, "[The means of correct training](#)"

Week 7: Jun 3

Foucault V: Panopticism

- Reading: M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Part III, Chap. 3, "[Panopticism](#)"

Week 8: Jun 10

Foucault VI: Bio-Power and Population

- Reading: M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, Part 5, "[Right of Death and Power over Life](#)"

Week 9: Jun 17

Foucault VII: Technologies of the Self

- Reading: M. Foucault, "[Technologies of the self](#)"

Week 10: Jun 24 (Writing assignment topic due)

Influence of Foucault's approach to human beings (Hacking):
Social constructionism and human beings

- Reading: I. Hacking, *Evolution*, Chapter Four, "[Madness: Biological or constructed?](#)"

Week 11: Jul 1

Critique of Foucault's conception of power (Habermas): Power vs. communicative reason

- Reading: J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Chap. 9, "[The critique of reason as an unmasking of the human sciences: Michel Foucault](#)"

Week 12: Jul 8 (Writing assignment bibliography due)

Critique of Foucault's account of power (Fraser): Feminist critique of Foucault on power

- Reading: N. Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, Chaps. 2 and 3, "[Michel Foucault: A 'young conservative', and Foucault's body language](#)"

Week 13: Jul 15

Critique Foucault's human-centric analysis of power (Latour): Actor-networks

- Reading: B. Latour, *Evolution*, "[Technology is Society Made Durable](#)"

Week 14: Jul 22

Presentations and discussion

- No reading