SHUM 2750 INTRODUCTION TO THE HUMANITIES
SCIENCE IN HUMAN CULTURE

Spring 2021
Dr. Ellen Abrams

Course Description:

In 1959, British chemist-turned-novelist C. P. Snow described a split between two cultures. On one side were scientists who knew nothing about literature, and on the other side were humanists who could not explain the basic laws of physics. In effect, Snow laid the groundwork for a debate that pitted one side against the other. Historians have since problematized this dualism, allowing an approach to the history of science that considers the production of knowledge as one among many products of culture.

This course introduces students to some of the key methods and ideas in the history of science and science and technology studies (STS) that have allowed for humanistic inquiry into the production of scientific knowledge. In the first half of the course, students will explore key themes in the cultural study of science, from Marxism and feminism to embodied and material practices. Coursework will include reading canonical texts as well as more recent scholarly interventions, participating in Zoom discussions, contributing to discussion boards, and writing one secondary source review essay.

The second half of the course will focus on the production of science in the United States, and students will conduct original research in a scientific archive at Cornell (digitized for remote access). Students may choose to work in the collections of the Cornell High Energy Synchrotron Source, the Cornell Kitchen, the Lab of Ornithology, or the Department of Mathematics. Other projects may be possible with instructor approval. Students will be guided through the research process, from proposals and preliminary findings to bibliographies and peer reviews.