

Bad Research and Information Heresies (English 81/History 90C)

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Fall 2012 Wednesday 1:15-4

Science Center 105

Course description: This cross-disciplinary class draws takes apart the distinctions between academic, professional, and everyday research in order to ask what research is: What do we mean by research, why do we do it, and when did we start? How do we describe the practice? How might we build some theories of research? What are the explicit and implicit understandings that underpin research in different situations and institutions? We will explore topics like search, dictionaries and encyclopedias library catalog, archival organization, metadata; theories and aesthetics of research; print vs digital formats and strategies; very large data sets; the digital humanities; the invention of “facts”; information as concept and theory; realism and the novel; impact of intellectual property; the poetics and practicalities of research by students and faculty at Swarthmore. Our chronology will extend from the early modern era through the last day of class. For juniors and seniors from any major.

Course requirements: The reading load for each week is substantial, particularly in the first half of the semester. There will be several formal writing assignments during the semester, the last of which is expected to be a substantial project involving some independent study. In the last third of the class, we will also be expecting students to locate relevant material for that week’s discussion and report back to the class as a whole about that material. Active participation and regular attendance are a requirement throughout the semester. In the last half of the semester, we will also have visitors who will discuss their own research practices in their professional and creative lives: students will be expected to come to class ready to engage in a general conversation about our visitors’ practice of research.

Part 1: The Production of Research

Week I (September 5): The invention of the research university

William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Idea of the University*, Prologue, Chapter 5, Chapter 8, Chapter 11. Available as an ebook through Tripod.

Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas*, “Interdisciplinarity and Anxiety”, pp. 93-126

Anthony Grafton, “The Public Intellectual and the American University”, in *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West*

Daniel Coit Gilman, *The Launching of a University*, “Research”, pp. 237-255. At

GoogleBooks, http://books.google.com/books?id=qJ7hdKjl3CcC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ViewAPI#v=onepage&q&f=false

Come to class ready to talk about your own experiences and understandings of research within Swarthmore College.

*Weekend trip, Sept. 8th (voluntary): Visit with historical re-enactors at Brandywine Battlefield Park

Week II (September 12) The fact, the encyclopedia, the taxonomy, the archive, the notebook

Barbara Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact*, pp. 1-62, pp.105-138
Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge*, Vol. 2, pp. 11-84
Jacob Soll, *The Information Master*, pp. 120-152
Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, "Classifying"

Writing assignment #1: Locate and describe a taxonomy you encounter in everyday life.

Week III (September 19) Catalogs, Databases, Notations

Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know*, all (bookstore)
Marcus Krajewski, *Paper Machines*, pp. 1-52

Week IV (September 26) Dictionaries and Reference

Simon Winchester, *The Professor and the Madman* (bookstore)
Daniel Headrick, *When Information Came of Age*, "Storing Information", pp. 142-180

1st paper (4-5 pp.) due September 26 at midnight via email attachment

Part 2: Living Research, Research Lives

Week V (October 3)

Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, all (bookstore)
Carolyn Steedman, "Romance in the Archive"

Writing assignment #2: Starting from Steedman's partial critique of the archive narrative's reliance on the romance genre, come up with your own alternative genre for narrativizing or describing research, and explain its benefits and drawbacks.

Week VI (October 10)

Coleridge, "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" (Read it in GoogleBooks facsimile of *Lyrical Ballads*(pages 1-51) or in the less attractive but typographical condensed form from Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/151/151-h/151-h.htm>)

J. L. Lowes, *Road to Xanadu* (Preface, chapter 1, 2,3,10, 12)
J.L. Lowes, "The MLA and Humane Scholarship"
Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy"
Cleanth Brooks, "Current Critical Theory and the Period Course"
Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, pp. 1-59

Week VII (October 17 – October break)

Week VIII (October 24)

Michel Lamont, *How Professors Think*, pp. 1-158

Weber, Max 1949 "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy." pp.50-112

Bruno Latour, "An Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto", *New Literary History*, 2010, 41: 471-490

Writing assignment #3: Prepare a hypothetical research proposal for submission to one of several grant-giving competitions, and determine your proposal's need for IRB review.

Part 3. "Bad" (?) Research

Week IX (October 31): Research Ethics?

Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, all (bookstore)

Pages from the archive of Charles Reade, forgotten Victorian novelist-researcher

Trevor Norton, *Smoking Ears and Screaming Teeth*, "Lovely Grubs"

Lauren Slater, *Opening Skinner's Box*, Chapter 2 (Milgram)

["The Bedroom and Beyond"](#) (short essay on Kinsey's methods)

Film: "Kinsey"

Discussion of final assignment

Week X (November 7): Forgery, Failure, and Negative Results

[David Freedman, "Lies, Damned Lies and Medical Science"](#)

Kathryn Schultz, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*

Hoffer, *Past Imperfect*, "The Case of Michael Bellesiles"

Salisbury and Sujo, *Provenance: How a Con Man and a Forger Rewrote the History of Modern Art*

Writing assignment #4: find and report on cases of academic fraud, research misconduct, or exaggerated & misrepresented research findings [starter list of suggestions provided by professors]

Week XI (November 14): The Aesthetics of Research and Research into Aesthetics

Carl Wilson, *Celine Dion's Let's Talk About Love* (all) (bookstore)

"Our Aesthetic Categories: An Interview with Sianne Ngai" (Adam Jasper interview with SN on taste and affect)

http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/43/jasper_ngai.php

[TV Tropes](#)

Corrine Kratz, "In and Out of Focus", *American Ethnologist*, 37: 4, 2010.

Writing assignment #5: Sketch out a research plan for one of your cultural tastes or preferences. You might, following Wilson, use research to attempt to open up or change one of your cultural tastes, or you might try to use research in order to denaturalize one of your ingrained tastes.

Week XII (November 21)

No class. [Note: our final class will run until 6 pm to make up these hours.]

Week XIII: Crowdsourcing, Collective Research, Everyday Research

Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, Chapter 1

Michael Nielsen, *Reinventing Discovery*, Chapter 7

[Council on Library and Information Resources, *One Culture: Computationally Intensive Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences*](#)

Michel Callon et alia, section from (page #s) *Acting in an Uncertain World: An Essay on Technical Democracy*, Prologue, Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Chapter 4

Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, Chapter 3

Writing assignment #6: Examine an example of crowdsourcing, networked knowledge or computational analysis of very large data sets in humanistic/social science research from the page of suggestions distributed before class. Report back to the class about your impressions. [examples: Lyon et al "Using Internet Intelligence to Manage Biosecurity Risks"; Atlantic essay on Wikipedia/Reddit class; other Wikipedia examples; [i love bees](#); Iowa Electronic Market; CrowdFlower; Threadless; Mechanical Turk; SETI @ home; The Polymath Project; We Feel Fine]

Week XIV (December 5) (1:15-6 pm): Presentations on final assignments

Final assignment due by Friday Dec. 14th

Texts and Assignments

Books for purchase

Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know* (Yale, paperback, 0300165390 / 978-0300165395)

Carl Wilson, *Let's Talk about Love: A Journey to the End of Taste*. Continuum, 2007 (082642788 / 978-0826427885)

Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (paperback)

Simon Winchester, *The Professor and the Madman* (Harper, 0060839783 / 978-0060839789)

R L Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Broadview, 9781551116556 / 1551116553)

All other readings will be available as pdfs via our Dropbox or as ebooks via Tripod.

Short writing assignments

Every few weeks, we will ask you to write a response of a page or two to a fairly specific question; some are already on the syllabus, others may be assigned on an ad hoc basis. You will email these questions as attachments to both Professor Burke and Professor Buurma.

Short paper

In our first month of classes we will have talked about "The Production of Research," reading about the institutional contexts in which we do research (Week I, "The invention of the research university), the structures of knowledge that partially determine what research can do and mean (Week II, "The fact, the Encyclopedia, the Taxonomy, the

Archive, the Notebook”), and the tools research both builds and relies upon (Weeks III and IV, “Catalogs, Databases, Notations, Dictionaries, Reference”). This 4-5 page short paper asks you to think about “The Production of Research” in the Swarthmore context. What difference does the institutional shift from research university to liberal arts college make – if it makes a difference at all? How does your experience with doing research square with, or depart from, the scenes and examples of academic research we’ve encountered so far? These are some of the kinds of questions you may want to address in this paper, but your paper should not answer them separate, but rather make a single, main claim or assertion and discuss it using very specific examples. This is an overview; the full assignment will be given in class. **Due Wednesday, December 26th by midnight.**

Final paper

This longer culminating exercise invites you to produce a more sustained and independent piece of research about research. You might write a manifesto for or against the use of research in a certain discipline, field, or context; you might produce your own theory of inter-, cross-, or anti-disciplinary research. You might design a (safe) self-experiment in order to learn something about your own research practices, or an experiment to learn about the research practices of a ready-to-hand group of people who are doing some form of “everyday” or “lay” research, and write a report of the results. Or you might pursue through one of the syllabus topics onto new ground. In any of these cases, you will want to think about the relation between the genre or form of your project, how you will structure your question or argument, and the audience for whom you are writing. This is an overview; the full assignment will be given in class. **Due Friday, December 16th by midnight.**

Policies and Advice

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a very serious offence. It includes both the direct copying of the words of another person without crediting him or her and paraphrasing the ideas of another person without giving credit. See the English department’s guidelines on how to properly cite sources here:

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/x10027.xml>

If you have any questions about how to properly cite another person’s work, please do not hesitate to ask me.

Accommodations for disability

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Leslie Hempling in the Office of Student Disability Services (Parrish 130) or e-mail lhempli1@swarthmore.edu to set up an appointment to discuss your needs. Leslie Hempling is responsible for reviewing and approving disability-related accommodation requests. As appropriate, she will issue students with documented disabilities an Accommodation Authorization Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact her as soon as possible. For details about the Student Disabilities Service and the accommodations process, visit <http://www.swarthmore.edu/student-life/academic-advising-and-support/student-disability-services.xml>. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged through Leslie Hempling in the Office Of Student Disability Services.