

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Science and Technology Studies
Professional Development Seminar (ProSem)
SYLLABUS

Spring 2011
Tuesday, 2-5 pm
Sage Lab 5711

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Course Overview

This seminar is designed to help you develop the professional skills needed for a successful career as a scholar. There are five components of the course: 1) student presentations; 2) practical skills development workshops; 3) lectures by visiting scholars; 4) a semester-long writing project, appropriate to the each student's stage in the graduate program; 5) peer review of student work.

Expected Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this seminar, students will:

- Understand the range of professional skills required for success in the field of STS and know how to find relevant sources of guidance/support.
- Produce original written work, appropriate to their stage in the graduate program.
- Give effective oral presentations and respond thoughtfully to feedback.
- Offer constructive peer review of written work.
- Offer constructive questions and feedback on professional presentations.

Presentations

All students must give at least one presentation at some point during the semester. These may be relatively informal presentations of "half-baked" ideas, or they may be polished conference presentations (or anything in-between). Except for the weeks when there is a visiting speaker, at least one student will give a presentation at each class meeting. Sign-ups will take place during the first class meeting. Generally, one hour of class time will be allotted for presentations, including the question and answer period.

Practical Skills Development Workshops ("Brownbags")

Many of the course meetings will be dedicated to discussion and practice of particular professional skills such as: writing grant proposals, writing effectively for journal publication, giving conference presentations, etc.

Colloquium Series

Three to four class periods will be dedicated to lectures by visiting scholars. Students will be expected to attend, engage in the question and answer period, and critically assess the presentation in a later class meeting.

Writing

Each student will craft a semester-long project that is appropriate for his/her current stage in the graduate program. You have latitude in designing the project, but you must submit a 500-word description of your plans at the second class meeting, explaining how you will carry it out and how it will further your development as a scholar and researcher. I invite you to meet with me to brainstorm ideas if you need help defining a project. There are two requirements:

1) All students must hand in written work for peer review at least three times (e.g. an abstract with outline, a first draft, and a final draft), and deadlines for these should be included in your project proposal. The first iteration should be handed in sometime before week 5, the second iteration before week 9, and the final iteration before week 13.

2) No matter what type of project you choose, the final thing you hand in should be a polished manuscript, meaning no spelling/grammar/logic mistakes, a complete bibliography, no parenthetical asides indicating future revisions, etc. It is important to get into the habit of producing well-edited documents.

Examples of acceptable formats for the project include, but are not limited to:

- Critical literature review – For this type of project, you will select a central question and critically assess the existing literature addressing that question.
- Research proposal – You may submit a draft of a dissertation proposal or grant proposal.
- Pilot study – If you are beginning to investigate a topic, this is a good opportunity to take a stab at interpreting the evidence you have collected so far and write a first draft of an article manuscript or conference paper.
- Article manuscript – If you have previously written a paper, you may revise that paper into something of publishable quality.
- Exam essay – Prepare an essay answering one or more questions that were asked on past qualifying exams.
- Conference paper and presentation – Prepare an abstract, short paper (approx 10 pages) and 20-minute conference presentation. If you plan to do this, talk with me about scheduling your presentation.
- Series of mini-lectures – This is an option for first-year students. The idea is to prepare a series of short (15 min) presentations (minimum 3) on important theoretical ideas or debates in STS, and to respond to questions and peer feedback. There should be some small writing component to this, such as a memo reflecting on the success of each lecture, or handouts to accompany the lectures. If you choose to do this, talk with me about scheduling your presentations.

Peer Review

All students will exchange writing for peer review throughout the semester. Work will be distributed on a rolling basis, but there are four class periods scheduled for discussion of the reviews.

Grading

Presentation (20%)

Participation throughout the semester (40%)

Completed project (40%)

Schedule

Date	Due in class	Topic	Presenter
1/25		Brownbag: Library research and citation management **	
2/1	Project proposals	Peer review: Project proposals	
2/9	<i>First iteration*</i>	Colloquium	Invited speaker (Weds.)
2/15	<i>First iteration</i>	Brownbag: Exams and the dissertation	
2/22	<i>First iteration</i>	Brownbag: Writing and study skills	
3/1	Peer reviews	Peer review: First iteration	
3/8	<i>Second iteration</i>	Brownbag: Conferences	
3/23	<i>Second iteration</i>	Colloquium	Invited speaker (Weds.)
3/29	<i>Second iteration</i>	Brownbag: Classroom strategies	
4/5	Peer reviews	Peer review: Second iteration	
4/19	<i>Third iteration</i>	Brownbag: Funding sources	
4/27	<i>Third iteration</i>	Colloquium	Invited speaker (Weds.)
5/3	<i>Third iteration</i>	Brownbag: Publishing	
5/10	Peer reviews	Peer review: Third iteration	

*In the project proposals, students should set due dates that fall within these date ranges.

**Brownbag topics may change. Suggestions welcome.