Gallatin School, New York University

Interdisciplinary Seminar - Spies Like Us? Cold War Science as the Ultimate National Security Threat (IDSEM-UG1658)

Fall 2011 - Monday & Wednesday 12:30 p.m. - 1:45 p.m. 7E12 - Room 129
Professor - José Perillán
Email – jgp10@nyu.edu
Office Hours – By Appt. Monday 4 – 6 p.m. & Tuesday 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Gallatin Rm. 425

Course Description -

On Friday June 19th, 1953 just before the sun set on Sing-Sing prison, Ethyl and Julius Rosenberg were executed by electrocution for their part in an espionage network that transferred classified information associated with top secret U.S. atomic research to the Soviet Union. This case was a landmark at the height of tensions associated with the second Red Scare of the 1940s and 50s, but the almost half-century of Cold War tensions, teetering on the brink of global annihilation, brought out the devastating threats of societal paranoia and political persecution. Throughout the Cold War period science was wielded by both the United States and the Soviet Union with alarming efficacy. As big science began to dominate international and domestic policy, the two superpowers played ‘chicken’ with an atomic arms race and ‘catch me if you can’ with a space race that seemed to fuel animosity and bring us ever closer to the brink of world catastrophe. In this seminar we will use primary and secondary sources to examine the complex role of science during the Cold War, as weapon, threat, and salvation. Readings may include works by J.R. Oppenheimer, Deborah Cadbury, Albert Einstein, John Lewis Gaddis, John Earl Hayes & Harvey Klehr, and Jessica Wang among others.

General Expectations -

In this course we will focus on developing strong strategies for thinking, reading, and writing critically. Using a variety of readings, we will learn to deconstruct an author’s argument and subsequently evaluate its effectiveness. With the help of readings and class discussions we will learn about topics in cold war science. I look forward to animated yet respectful discussions of the topics covered.

Attendance is Mandatory-

In addition, on time attendance is expected. In the event of an unavoidable absence, please notify me by e-mail as soon as possible, and I will make arrangements with you to catch up on the work you missed. Class participation is a significant portion of your grade, so please come to class on time, with your assignments completed, and prepared to engage the rest of the class in lively discussion.
Readings –

The following texts are required reading for this course. Books will be available for purchase through the NYU bookstore and all assigned readings that are essays, papers, or excerpts will be made available for copy or download.

Books –

Required -


Recommended –


Reading & Writing Assignments –

Students will be assigned both reading and writing assignments every week. The writing will include informal in-class writing, weekly responses to the assigned readings, and formal writing assignments. Formal assignments will include one shorter exploratory essay in addition to an analytic essay and a final research paper. All written assignments should be double-spaced, paginated, stapled, in 12-point font, and with 1-inch margins on all sides.

Formal Assignment 1: Exploratory Essay: Cold War Fear (7-8 pages)

Formal Assignment 2: Analytic Essay: Deconstructing an Argument (7-8 pages)

Formal Assignment 3: Research Paper (10-12 pages)
Late Assignments -

Assignments will be downgraded for every day they are late. If there are extenuating circumstances, please notify me in advance of the due date so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Academic Honesty -

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are very serious offenses and will not be tolerated in this course. Any act, deliberate or otherwise, will be reported immediately to the Gallatin administration for disciplinary action. More information about Gallatin’s expectations for academic integrity can be found at: www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html

Grading -

Formal Assignment 1: Exploratory Essay 20%
Formal Assignment 2: Analytic Essay 25%
Formal Assignment 3: Research Paper 30%
Response Papers 15%
Class Participation 10%
Tentative Syllabus -

Students are assigned weekly readings and reading response papers so they should come to class prepared to participate in class discussions. 1-2 page response papers with reflections and observations on the reading assignments will be assigned weekly.

Week 1 – September 7
- Introduction to course - ICCI communication – overview
- Reading assignment: Macintyre p. 3 – 165
- Reading response due (9/12)

Week 2 – September 12 & 14
- Reading assignment: Macintyre p. 166 - 350
- Reading response due (9/19)

Week 3 – September 19 & 21
- Reading assignment: Gaddis p. ix - 155
- Reading response due (9/26)

Week 4 – September 26 & 28
- Reading assignment: Gaddis p. 156 - 266
- Reading response due (10/3)

Week 5 – October 3 & 5
- Reading assignment: Kackman (Complete)
- Reading response due (10/12)
Week 6 – October 12

- Reading assignment: Kelly selected readings from sections 1 - 5
- **Formal Assignment #1 due October 17**

Week 7 – October 17 & 19

- Reading assignment: Kelly selected readings from sections 6 - 9
- Reading response due (10/24)

Week 8 – October 24 & 26

- Reading assignment: Haynes and Klehr p. xi - 137
- Reading Response Due (10/31)

Week 9 – October 31 & November 2

- Reading assignment: Haynes and Klehr p. 138 – 241
- Reading Response Due (11/7)

Week 10 - November 7 & 9

- Reading assignment: Wang p. xi - 147
- **Formal Assignment #2 due November 14**

Week 11 – November 14 & 16

- Reading assignment: Wang p. 148 - 295
- Reading Response Due (11/21)

Week 12 - November 21 & 23 (Thursday the 24th is Thanksgiving!)

- Reading assignment: Kaiser p. xi - 148
- Reading Response Due (11/28)
Week 13 – November 28 & 30

- Reading assignment: Kaiser p. 149 - 262
- Reading Response Due (12/5)

Week 14 - December 5 & 7

- Reading assignment: Black Board Reading + “Dr. Strangelove”
- Reading Response Due (12/12)

Week 15 – December 12 & 14

- Bringing it all together
- Formal Assignment #3 due December 16th by 5 pm