

WHAT'S NEW IN HSOC & STSC?

Looking ahead to 2023-2024

June 2023

NEW FACULTY

The History & Sociology of Science Department welcomes two new assistant professors to our faculty!



Zehra Hashmi

Zehra Hashmi studies identification technologies in South Asia and their intersection with surveillance, kinship and governance. Her current book project is a historical ethnography of Pakistan's national identity database. It follows how this information system uses data as a kin-making substance to redefine who counts as kin, and ultimately, a citizen. Her work brings an anthropological understanding to bear on debates concerning a central feature of life today: digital identification. This fall, Prof. Hashmi will be teaching **STSC 1600: Information Age** and **STSC 3766: Cultures of Surveillance**.



John Kanbayashi

John Kanbayashi is an Assistant Professor in the History and Sociology of Science (HSS). His research explores how people in East Asia came to know and use the non-human world in new ways amidst global political turmoil, with a focus on Japan and Taiwan in the early 20th century. He is particularly interested in issues relating to rivers, water, and climate. A native of Western Illinois, he has lived and researched in various parts of Japan, Taiwan, mainland China, and the American Northeast. Prof. Kanbayashi is offering **STSC 1880: Environment & Society** this fall.

NEW INSTRUCTORS

The History & Sociology of Science Department welcomes an Integrated Studies Teaching Fellow and a Communication within the Curriculum Fellow to our undergraduate program this fall.



David E. Dunning

David E. Dunning is a historian of science and technology whose research focuses on the material and social dimensions of abstract knowledge. He aims to understand the embodied practices behind artifacts like computer programs and logic proofs, and how cultural contexts shape practices that are too often mistaken for neutral articulations of pure reason. His current book project is a history of two fundamental transformations in the study of logic, as it was first reconstructed as a mathematical science and later as a theoretical foundation for computing. His other ongoing projects explore gender and domesticity in the history of mathematics and the rise of the “language” metaphor in early computer programming. Dr. Dunning will be teaching a new course, ***STSC 2421: Manufacturing Minds: From Babbage to ChatGPT.***



Anna Lehr Mueser

Anna Lehr Mueser is a seventh-year PhD candidate in the History and Sociology of Science here at Penn. Her work explores the intersections of collective memory and watershed management and development. Anna’s dissertation, “Land After Technology: Collective Memory and the New York City Water Supply” examines how collective memories and knowledge practices in the Catskill Mountains of New York have addressed, resisted, and incorporated the history of New York City’s rural watershed development in the twentieth century. Her work explores how place and belonging are created and shaped through ideas about history. Anna is a 2023-2024 Critical Speaking Fellow with the Communication Within the Curriculum program at the University of Pennsylvania. She will be teaching a new course, ***STSC 1761: Nature & The City: Place, Memory and Environment.***

NEW COURSES

Check out these late-addition department courses that are open for Fall 2023. These courses fulfill HSOC and STSC department elective requirements and some concentration requirements, too!

NATURE AND THE CITY

PLACE, MEMORY, AND ENVIRONMENT

STSC 1761
FALL 2023
MONDAYS
5:15-8:15 PM
Anna Lehr Mueser

When news articles say that we've known about the climate crisis for decades, who is included in that "we"? What does place have to do with which events are memorialized and which are forgotten? In this course we'll explore the relationships among cities, environments, and ideas about the past in the United States. Using readings and field trips around Philadelphia, this course offers new ways to think about how people in the United States have understood their relationships to the places they live in and depend on.

THE INFORMATION AGE

STSC 1600
Tuesday & Thursday, 5:15-6:15
Friday recitation: 12-1 pm or 1:45-2:45pm
Instructor: Zehra Hashmi

We are said to live in an "information age." Information technologies have been credited with ushering in an era of unprecedented information creation, collection, storage, and communication. We experience the impact of this firsthand: these technologies increasingly pervade our homes, our workplaces, our schools, our most private spaces. But what exactly do we mean when we speak of the information age? When and how did it come into being? In this course, we look to the history of information, information technologies, and information sciences, a history that long predates the digital computer. Although, at the center of our story will be the development of new information technologies—from the printing press and the telegraph to the computer and of course the Internet—our focus will not primarily be on machines, but on people and how individuals contributed to, made sense of, and dealt with the many transformational changes that have shaped the contours of our modern digital world. Our goal will be to deepen historical perspectives and build analytical tools to critically evaluate the role of information in our increasingly digital world today.

"Remember when, on the Internet, nobody knew who you were?"

manufacturing minds

from Babbage to ChatGPT

STSC/HSOC 2421 /// Dr. David Dunning

When asked to tell its own history, ChatGPT answers literally, describing (vaguely of course) its own training data set. When pressed to describe the longer history of "technology like you," it mentions early computer science, programs that played chess or solved math problems, before naming deep learning algorithms and big data as the key breakthroughs.

This lineage is not untrue, but it ignores the wider context in which individuals and organizations have come to pursue this strange dream of crafting an intelligent object. As an uncannily lucid conversation partner who freely performs all manner of textual tasks, ChatGPT participates in a longstanding tension in the history of information technology between the goals of manufacturing minds and making mindless clerical workers.

In this course we historicize that tension in three domains—calculation, knowledge work, and games—all of which directly inform our efforts to imagine what ChatGPT and its ilk might be. Throughout, we will attend to the ways machinery shaped specific tasks' construction in relation to gender, race, and class identities. We will see how technologies often imagined as disembodied are always material, interacting with human bodies and physical environments.

Fall 23 m/w 7:00-8:30pm

CULTURES OF SURVEILLANCE

STSC 3766
Wednesday, 10:15 am - 1:15 pm
Fall 2023
Instructor: Zehra Hashmi

Developments in digital technology have generated urgent political discussions about the pervasive role of surveillance in our everyday life, from the mundane to the exceptional. But surveillance has a much longer history. In this course, students will learn to think and write critically about the historical, socio-cultural, and political dynamics that define surveillance today. How can we historicize what we call surveillance to understand its political and social implications beyond what appears in the document caches of the NSA or on a Black Mirror episode? What role does identity and identification play in surveillance? How do surveillance and computational technologies produce racializing effects? Students will apply course concepts to technologies of daily use, such as self-tracking devices like fit bits or identity documents, and reflect on debates surrounding race, policing, imperialism, and privacy. Working with primary source materials, films, podcasts, and key texts, we will examine the multi-faceted phenomena of surveillance technology. Through assignments such as surveillance diaries, students will analyze how they understand surveillance to operate across various domains of everyday life.

NEW UNDERGRADUATE CHAIRS

Undergraduate chair appointments last for 3 years. This year, HSOC and STSC each welcome a new program chair. **Prof. Ramah McKay** will take up the role of the HSOC chair and **Prof. Sebastián Gil-Riaño** will serve as the STSC chair.

Ramah McKay studies the relationship between knowing about and caring for health and illness, and between health and the political imagination. She received her PhD in Anthropology and has taught at the University of Pennsylvania since 2015. She is the author of *Medicine in the Meantime: The work of care in Mozambique* (2018), and has researched topics such as home-based care and caregiving, pharmaceuticals, global health, and displacement.



“Greetings, all! I am delighted to be the incoming HSOC chair. As an HSOC faculty member since 2015, I have loved getting to know HSOC students, faculty, and staff, and I look forward to seeing familiar faces and meeting new ones in the fall. We have an amazing roster of fall courses coming up and I encourage anyone who is interested to check them out. Till then, I wish you a relaxing and restorative summer!” – Prof. Ramah McKay

Sebastián Gil-Riaño is an Assistant Professor of History and Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania. Born in Colombia and raised in Canada, he is a historian of science who studies transnational scientific conceptions of race, culture, and indigeneity in the twentieth century. His first book, [*The Remnants of Race Science: UNESCO and Economic Development in the Global South*](#) will be published by Columbia University Press on August 29th, 2023.



“Having taught in STSC for many years now, I’m really looking forward to working closely with all of you and to thinking about what an STSC degree can do beyond the classroom!” – Prof. Sebastián Gil-Riaño

Saying hello to new chairs, also means saying goodbye to the indomitable Prof. Elly Truitt. The History & Sociology of Science department extends a hearty “Thank you!” to Prof. Truitt for her service as STSC chair and as the interim HSOC chair during the 2022-23 academic year. Prof. Truitt will spend 2023-24 on a well-earned

sabbatical year devoted to her research and writing and will return to teaching in 2024-25. Until then, have a great year Prof. Truitt!



“It has been a pleasure to work with the dynamic, compassionate community of STSC and HSOC students over the past two years. I shall miss you all next year and look forward to seeing you when I return.” – Prof. Elly Truitt

THE NEW HONORS THESIS PROCESS

Beginning with the Class of 2025, HSOC students can pursue an Honors Thesis under our new program-specific policies and guidelines. Details on the new process will be posted on our website by the start of the Fall 2023 semester.

FEATURED FACULTY

Dr. Beans Velocci is an award-winning scholar and teacher in the history of sex, science, and classification, and an Assistant Professor in the History and Sociology of Science and GSWS departments.

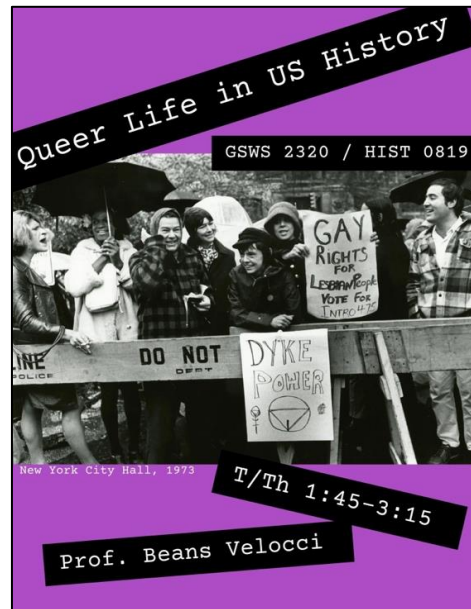
Their work uses queer, trans, and feminist methods to interrogate how classification systems become regarded as biological truths, primarily in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States. Their first book project, tentatively titled "Binary Logic: The Power of Incoherence in American Sex Science" and solicited by Duke University Press, is a prehistory of cisness that looks at how sex emerged as a privileged way of sorting bodies because it didn't have to make sense.



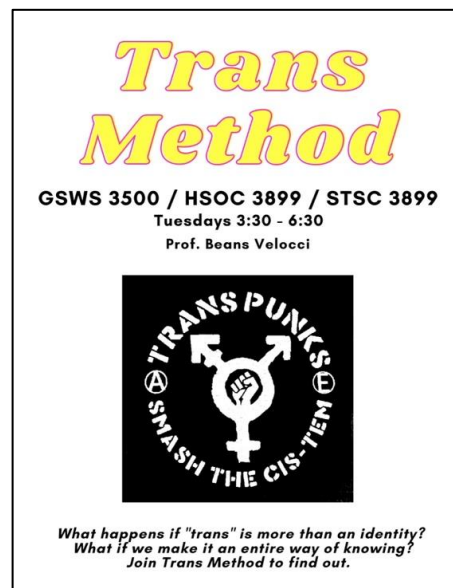
"My goal is to bring down the gender binary with primary source analysis." – Prof. Beans Velocci

Prof. Velocci is teaching two classes this fall: **GSWS 3500/HSOC 3899/STSC 3988: Trans Method** counts as a department elective and a Race, Gender & Health concentration elective in HSOC and **GSWS 2320/HIST 0819: Queer Life in US**

History can be petitioned as a course in some HSOC & STSC concentrations.



Queer Life in US History
GSWS 2320 / HIST 0819
New York City Hall, 1973
T/Th 1:45-3:15
Prof. Beans Velocci



Trans Method
GSWS 3500 / HSOC 3899 / STSC 3899
Tuesdays 3:30 - 6:30
Prof. Beans Velocci

TRANS PUNKS
SMASH THE CIS-TEM

What happens if "trans" is more than an identity?
What if we make it an entire way of knowing?
Join Trans Method to find out.

GET INVOLVED, STAY CONNECTED

- ⇒ **The program listservs.** All STSC and HSOC students are added to the program mailing lists when they declare their major. Through these email lists you'll receive important information about things like courses, registration information, programming, and even fellowships, prizes, and job opportunities.
- ⇒ **HSOC is on Instagram!** Did you know that HSOC has an official Instagram account? You can follow us [@pennhsoc](#) where we post information about awesome things our students (you!), faculty, grad students, and instructors are doing. We also share info about related events and programming on campus, our courses, etc.
- ⇒ **Connect with peers and alumni.** [STSC](#) and [HSOC](#) both have LinkedIn groups for students and alumni to connect. To join, just submit a request and you'll be connected to our ever-expanding network of graduates and current students.
- ⇒ **Be a leader and community builder in your major.** The student advisory groups for [STSC](#) and [HSOC](#) are also an incredible resource and a great way to get more involved in the major. The advisory groups build community through communication, programming, and special events and have also served as an important conduit for voicing student concerns, needs, and wants to the department's leadership. The [HSOC SAB](#) also maintains its own Instagram account.
- ⇒ **Want more info?** If you want to learn more about how to get involved in your major, reach out to [Dr. Jessica Martucci](#), the Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies and the major advisor for all STSC and HSOC students.

*****Enjoy your summer, we'll see you in August!*****