STS 5206: History of Technology
Fall 2014
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Note: This class is taught by teleconference from Blacksburg

This graduate-level introduction to the history of technology focuses on the predominant themes that scholars have pursued during the past 50 years. For example, students will read several books and articles that employ a “contextualist” approach to history of technology—an approach that examines hardware and artifacts within a context of public policy, economics, and society in general. Students will also evaluate criticisms of the historiographical approaches employed in the discipline and look at studies that have sought to remedy thematic and methodological imbalances. To highlight the principles, theories, and methodologies of research in the history of technology, the course will draw on the reading of lively examples of scholarly works. Topics will include the history of mass production, the nature of innovation, the relationship between business institutions and technology, electrification, public policy, and the technological “revolution” in the home. In general, this class will help students acquire a disciplinary fluency that will enable them to analyze academic scholarship in the history of technology and related fields. On a highly practical level, this course seeks to help students become better analytical thinkers, writers, and communicators.

Required books

Many of the course readings (as articles) will be available without charge on Scholar. Here is a list of the books that we will discuss. Please note that we will not be using any of these books until late September or early October, so there is no rush to buy them. Moreover, students will need to read EITHER From the American System or America’s Assembly Line (not both). In an early class, we will decide which students will read each book.


