Anthropology of Science

Professor: Alison Cool
alison.cool@nyu.edu
New York University
Department of Anthropology
Spring 2013
ANTH-UA 321 | 4 units | Class#: 13474 | Session: 01/28/2013 - 05/13/2013

Course Description:
The anthropology of science is based on the premise that scientific work is a form of meaningful social action and that the development of scientific knowledge is a form of cultural production. Early researchers in this field, taking inspiration from developments in feminist theory, postcolonial studies, and anthropology’s “reflexive turn,” brought anthropological concepts of culture to bear on the practices of scientific communities, and thereby challenged the notion of the sciences as “cultures of no culture.” This upper-level undergraduate seminar will focus on qualitative and ethnographic studies of laboratories and other sites of scientific labor in order to examine the mutual co-constitution of scientific and social knowledge. Course materials will cover a range of classic and contemporary ethnographies of natural and physical sciences, from high-energy particle physics to marine biology. Discussion topics will include scientific communication and controversies; the cultural work of experiments and methodological choices; and ideas of objectivity, representation, and abstraction.

Required Texts:

Assignments:
- Attendance and participation in all classes
- Careful preparation to discuss reading
- Weekly reading reactions posted on Blackboard,
- 2 page draft description of final research project, to be presented and workshoped in class
- 5-10 page final research paper due at end of the semester