

MIDWEST FACULTY SEMINAR
THE CHICAGO CENTER FOR TEACHING
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Everyday Life February 26-28, 2015

The question of how to study and represent the wide range of practices, affects and experiences that constitute what we call “everyday life” has occupied historians, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, literary critics and others for decades, if not longer. Thus, while the meaning of “everyday life” seems obvious as a term widely used in common speech, it remains simultaneously one of the most elusive as a category of study and also one of the most productive concepts with which scholars across the humanities and social sciences challenge their disciplines today.

The seminar will consider the different ways in which everyday life has been conceptualized by scholars across a wide range of disciplines. What, for instance, is the everyday to historians and literary critics? To sociologists and anthropologists? To philosophers and linguists? Are similar accounts of everyday life at work across these varied academic disciplines? Or has the everyday meant different things to different disciplines at different times?

This seminar will also examine new developments in the study of everyday life, with a special focus on how everyday life is understood across times, places, and genres. It begins, therefore, with a reconsideration of some of the foundational research on everyday life from scholars working in both Europe and other parts of the globe. What defines the study of everyday life for thinkers like Lefebvre and de Certeau? In what way does their work continue to inform work on everyday life in Europe and the United States? How has it been taken up by scholars working in places like South Asia and China? Are the conceptual foundations of the everyday similar across times and places? Or does thinking about everyday life in Africa and Asia force us to reconsider what we mean by the term?

Finally, the seminar also considers the varied ways in which scholars have sought to represent everyday life in their work. Is the academic essay sufficient to the project of coming to terms with what we understand everyday life to be? Or does the study of everyday life demand new ways of representing scholarly knowledge? How has the study of everyday life led to the proliferation of new genres of academic writing? How has it led scholars to consider modes of representation that go beyond the written form?

By exploring a wide range of ways in which everyday life has been conceptualized by scholars in the humanities and social sciences, the seminar hopes, on one level, to come to terms with an area of inquiry that is often as elusive as it is influential. At the same time, also aims to develop a sense of the ways in which the study of everyday life has influenced the way scholars across the disciplines do their work today.

Presenters will include Judith Farquhar (Anthropology), Leora Auslander (History), William Nickel (Slavic Languages and Literatures), Jacob Eyferth (East Asian Languages and Civilizations), Larry Rothfield (English), and others.