Science and Politics from Ancient Rome to Today
Great Expeditions, HONR 204D, Spring 2017

In the year 79 AD, the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius indiscriminately buried the wealthy and poor and this tragedy provides an amazing snapshot of life in Roman times. This snapshot will be captured in the traveling exhibit “Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis” at the Museum of the Rockies. Integrating the exhibit into the course, we will explore how elements of philosophy, public opinion, the political system, and values during Roman time influenced intellectual and scientific discourse, and compare how they shape science today. Thus, this interdisciplinary course will integrate philosophy, history, ethics, politics, art, and science, and we will discuss materials and case studies from many fields. Students will complete a research project on an issue of their choice, critically examining the political and ethical questions at stake, with the historical perspective in mind.

We will begin our trip to Italy in Sicily to explore the tremendous influence that Greek science, philosophy and art had on the Romans and their way of life. We will then follow the steps of Pliny and experience the area around Mt. Vesuvius (such as Oplontis, Pompeii, and Herculaneum). We will explore sites in and around Rome that highlight the role of politics, philosophy, science, medicine, and technology during the Roman Empire (ancient sites in Rome, the Vatican, Ostia Antica). Further, we will examine the great significance of the Italian Renaissance for science, politics, philosophy, and the arts by visiting Florence.

Trip: total travel time will be 17 days (most likely May 9-20, 2017) with an option to remain in Europe longer. Cost: approx. $4980 depending on exchange rate and based on 25 participants (20 participants: add $190). Included is airfare to Italy, travel within Italy, breakfasts and dinners, all entrance fees and guides. Student fundraising activities can offset a portion of this cost. Course: Spring 2017, 3 credits (meets 2 hours per week).

Instructors:
Dr. Kristen Intemann is an Associate Professor of Philosophy in the Department of History & Philosophy and specializes in the role of values in science, as well as ethical issues in science.
Dr. Christa Merzdorf is an Associate Professor in the Department of Cell Biology and Neuroscience with a focus on biomedical research.