



The 2009–2010 Klopsteg seminar series in SCIENCE IN HUMAN CULTURE presents:
SPRING 2010: LATIN AMERICA SERIES

ANTONIO BARRERA

“Empiricism and the New Science: Indian and European Doctors in the Atlantic World (Sixteenth Century)”

History Department, Colgate

Monday, April 5, 2010

4:00 - 5:30 pm

Hagstrum Room

University Hall 201

Evanston Campus

reception to follow

ABSTRACT: I argue that the European encounter of the New World is one of the key elements in the emergence of empirical practices that shaped sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries science in Europe. The encounter made possible both the partial rejection of classical authorities and the validation of personal experience as a source of knowledge. These empirical practices emerged as part of the commercial and imperial activities surrounding the exploration and colonization of the New World. In this talk, I discuss the 1571-1577 expedition of Dr. Francisco Hernández to Mexico and his empirical method. Philip II sent Dr. Hernández to Mexico, Peru, and the Philippines to collect information about, and samples of, medicinal plants. Why? Who proposed this idea? How did he accomplish his project? At the end, Hernández only stayed in Mexico (for six years) and the result of his work included, at least, 1,100 paintings of plants. Who made those paintings and how? My paper discusses the different issues involved in the Hernández expedition and puts this expedition in the larger context of the Spanish American colonial and commercial context.

BIO: Antonio Barrera-Osorio is associate professor of History at Colgate University. His areas of interest are History of Science and Atlantic World History. His book, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (University of Texas Press, 2006), and articles in journals and edited books explore the emergence of empirical practices in the Spanish American empire. His current book manuscript, *The Atlantic World and the Scientific Revolution*, studies the interactions between the Spain, England, and the Atlantic world and the emergence of modern science.