STS 6534, Cultural Studies of Science, Technology, and Medicine: Biomedicine

Instructor: Rebecca Hester

Wednesdays 7:00–9:45pm, Blacksburg & NVC Falls Church

What is biomedicine? How do we understand it and what does it look and feel like in practice? How does it operate as a culture, or many cultures, a set of practices, a social force, and a platform of/for power? What is our investment in it and how does it invest us? These are the questions that this graduate-level course explores. Drawing broadly from the social sciences and the humanities, and taking biomedicine as an object of inquiry, an episteme, and an aspiration, course readings will illuminate the politics, practices, cultures, economies, and technologies of western biomedicine. Specifically, the course will look at the birth of the clinic; clinical encounters and practices of biomedicine: the medicalization, biomedicalization and pharmaceuticalization of society; biological citizenship and biosociality; bio-economies; medical enhancement, and emerging frontiers of biomedicine from the microbiome to astrobiology and space medicine.

As a result of this course, students will have a deeper understanding of the social and cultural contexts of biomedicine as they articulate with those of the life sciences, engineering, and public health; the political stakes in biomedical research and practice; and ethical issues at the emerging frontiers of biomedicine and medical enhancement. Students will also be able to competently articulate and debate key theoretical approaches in the social and cultural studies of biomedicine and understand how the boundaries of both human biology and human ontology are being pushed by techno-scientific advances in western biomedicine.