Advanced Topics Policy: Risk in Contemporary Culture

STS 6664
Fall 2015
3 Credit Hours
Time: Monday, 7-9:45PM
Locations: NVC, room TBC

Instructor: Sonja D. Schmid, Ph.D.
Phone: 703.538.8482
E-mail: sschmid@vt.edu
Office Hours: by appointment (in person, by phone, or video chat)

Introduction
This seminar provides an introduction to the phenomenon of risk from a sociological, historical, and cultural perspective. We will ask questions such as: What constitutes a risk and for whom? Who gets to decide what risks are worth taking? What constitutes credible information and what role do experts play? We will explore how ideas of safety, reliability, and probability shape our understanding of risk, and address the assumptions underlying and influencing the practices of risk assessment and regulation. We will focus on the role of communication, trust, and legitimacy in risk management and regulation, and debate which democratic policy instruments might facilitate stable, consensual decisions in contemporary societies. In addition to theoretical essays, we will discuss a selection of cases.

Readings
Three books are recommended for purchase (available through the bookstore and online); all other readings will be made available on the course website on Scholar.

Assignments and Expectations
Active participation in class discussion and regular attendance is expected. Assignments include moderating class discussion at least once, writing short weekly responses to the readings, peer review of your colleagues’ drafts, writing a research paper on a topic of your choice, and presenting your work in class.

Academic Conduct
Throughout this course, we’ll adhere to VT’s Principles of Community, and strictly enforce VT’s Honor Code. That means zero tolerance for academic violations such as cheating, plagiarism, and falsification. For more details, please consult http://ghs.graduateschool.vt.edu/