STS 5106: Contemporary Issues in Science & Technology

Spring 2014
CRN 19063  Instructor: Sonja D. Schmid, Ph.D.
3 Credit Hours  Phone: (703) 538-8482
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Summary
This seminar provides an introduction to social studies of technology. Who creates new technologies, who uses them, and what do designers, regulators, and other users know about each other? How can we make technologies safe, fair, and user-friendly, and who defines such goals? Over the last few decades, scholars in Science and Technology Studies (STS) have developed new theoretical and methodological approaches to analyzing not only the transformative impacts of technologies on society, but also how social arrangements fundamentally influence the development of technologies in the first place. We will discuss topics ranging from the social construction of technology to testing, national styles, technology and development, and users of technologies, to name but a few. Readings will include foundational texts in Technology Studies, as well as case studies. Students will come to understand our world as a large socio-technical system; applying STS-tools to a specific aspect of it by will allow new insights into how societies and technologies interact.
Due to the diversity in this field, we will only be able to cover a fraction of possible topics. I am willing to modify the syllabus to some extent to accommodate students’ distinct preferences. There are no prerequisites for this course, although familiarity with basic STS concepts is an asset.

Readings
Five books are recommended for purchase (available through online retailers); all remaining readings will be made available on the course website.

Assignments and Expectations
Active participation in class discussion and regular attendance is expected. Assignments include completing the assigned readings before the next class meeting, writing short weekly reading responses, moderating class discussion at least once a semester, a midterm essay, and a final essay (or, alternatively, a research paper on a topic of your choice).

Academic Conduct
The VT Honor Code will be enforced in this course. That means zero tolerance for academic violations such as cheating, plagiarism, and falsification. For more details, please consult http://ghs.graduateschool.vt.edu/ or contact the instructor.