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 we will 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
Four books are recommended for purchase (available through the bookstore and online); all other readings are available online through the course website on Scholar (“Resources”).

Assignments and Expectations
Active participation in class discussion and regular attendance is expected. Assignments include moderating class discussion at least once a semester, 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
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://www.honorsystem.vt.edu and http://www.english.vt.edu/plagiarism/plagiarism1.html.