

Overview

Biology and biotechnology are major influences on our societies, determining what we eat, who we are and where we come from, how we define health, prevent and treat illness. These sciences have been used to justify public policies and social reforms – from eugenics to genomics.

This course will explore the cultural, political and economic factors that have shaped the life sciences in the contemporary period. It will also investigate the role played by biological arguments in public policy and identity politics. Some areas of interest might include health and society, biology and public policy, food and population, and environment and society.

Goals

1. To introduce students to critical science and technology studies (S&TS) perspectives on the knowledge and practices of life sciences.
2. To understand that the way societies create knowledge on biology is social, and the way they use it is also social.
3. To provide the skills and perspectives necessary to confront problems with biological, social, and political dimensions
4. To develop research, writing and communication skills

Requirements

For each class you need to carry out the required readings to take an active part in the course.

Classroom protocol: there is no texting in this class. The use of laptop computers in class is allowed for note taking purposes only.

Provisional Course Outline

9 two-hour sessions

Sessions 1-2: the "bio-economy" and the commodification of life

Sessions 3-4: expertise, patients' involvement, "bio-citizenship"

Sessions 5: regulatory science and the politics of risk

Session 6: identity politics and "bio-socialities"

Session 7-8: governing bodies, issues of bio-politics

Session 9: wrap-up session and serious game (*PlayDecide*) on biotech, society and politics

Total amount of hours: 54 hours = 18 hours in-class and 36 hours out-of-class study

Bibliography (abridged version)

Epstein, S. (1996). *Impure science: AIDS, activism, and the politics of knowledge* (Vol. 7). Univ of California Press.

Guthman, J. (2011). *Weighing in: Obesity, food justice, and the limits of capitalism* (Vol. 32). Univ of California Press.

Nelson, A. (2016). *The social life of DNA: Race, reparations, and reconciliation after the genome*. Beacon Press.

Evaluation

30% of FINAL GRADE

Written exam:

This 1 and a half hour exam will take place at the end of the semester and will consist of a set of questions.

30% of FINAL GRADE

A 25-minute recap in pairs of the reading assignments. The recap must engage and challenge the other students.

40% of FINAL GRADE

A 10-page "dossier" on a course-related theme

