

Drugs, Politics & Culture, STS.062J/21A.344J

Paper #2, due 3 days prior to last class.
Email to the instructor and your section leader.

Length: 10 pages (approx 3000 words)

Pick a drug or aspect of a drug -- this can be an illegal drug, a legal drug, or a pharmaceutical (you can extend your first paper if you negotiate this with your TA about how to do so).

Your task is to evaluate the scientific-medical research about it. If your drug is popular, you will have to limit your research to some aspect of the research. In any case, start with PubMed (<http://www.pubmed.com>) and other scientific-medical resources at MIT (<http://libraries.mit.edu/vera>). You can imagine that this paper is the background survey of literature for a grant for further research on the drug. In other words, it needs to be extremely well reasoned and defended (because those grant reviewers will be looking for reasons not to fund it).

Start by reading as many abstracts, articles, and other text sources as you can the topic. Then write a paper arguing what is known about the drug, how dangerous it is health-wise, and how much isn't known about it.

This paper should include

1. A summary assessment of the basic issues involved in studying the drug scientifically and medically.
2. An assessment of the best facts that you can find. 60-70% of your paper should be spent here.
 - a. Medical journal articles, interviews, meta-analysis
 - b. The assumptions in these facts
 - c. The limitations of the studies
 - d. Competing factsThis means: critically evaluate these facts -- sample size, who are the authors, what is meant by drug use and abuse, what "drug" is actually studied, what generalizations are possible and what aren't. Cite class readings in making your arguments.
3. A map of the field of medical facts available to the average consumer of news: 20-30% of your paper.
 - a. What sorts of medical facts about the drug are in the news and on sites?
 - b. What studies are these facts based on?

c. How does this compare with your evaluation of the sci-med literature?

d. How do you account for discrepancies (how are facts circulating)?

Research the fields of facts and controversies around it, especially the news media (NOT just websites). Use google and <https://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>, but DO NOT make the mistake of arguing that these = research. Cite class readings in making your argument.

4. Conclude by discussing what isn't known. What sorts of studies (specifically) might be better?

Grading:

A papers will be well-written, without grammar or spelling problems, well-structured, properly footnoted. They will contain analysis using concepts from class (including citations). The arguments will provide defended evidence and a critique of that evidence.

B papers will be well-written, without grammar or spelling problems, well-structured, properly footnoted. The arguments will provide defended evidence.

C papers will be well-written, well-structured, properly footnoted. They will contain arguments with evidence.

All papers need to be well-argued. This means that when you make any claim you provide the reader with a clear means to understand what evidence you based your claim on (reasons), and the means to check that evidence (footnotes).