

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

Paper #1, due 7 days after the sixth class.

Email to the instructor and your section leader.

Length: 7-10 pages (approx 3000 words)

Pick a drug-risk category (e.g. hormone replacement therapy, high cholesterol drugs, prophylactic breast cancer drugs, antidepressants for mild depression, anti-obesity drugs, prescription sleeping pills, PTSD drugs, ADHD stimulants, etc.)

Thoroughly research the fields of facts and controversies around it, especially the news media (NOT just websites). Learn to use and make full use of Lexis-Nexis:

<https://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>

(Access this from within MIT) Start by reading as many articles as you can the topic. Then write a paper on whether you or someone like you or someone close to you should take the drug or not, for what reasons, acknowledging the remaining questions about it, and whether they might consider stopping if they are already taking it.

This paper should include

1. A summary assessment of the basic issues involved in why the drug(s) should be considered, including a controversy that has arisen and why.
2. A map of the field of facts available to the average consumer of news:
 - a. What that person might know, and where they might know it from.
 - b. An evaluation of the form of information: how clear is it, how easy is it to trace its source.
 - c. This map should include newspaper and other mass media articles, ads, websites, books, etc.
3. An assessment of the best facts that you can find.
 - a. Medical journal articles, interviews, meta-analysis
 - b. The assumptions in these facts

- c. The limitations of the studies
 - d. Competing facts
4. Your best recommendation -- assume someone needs an answer before class 7.
 - a. What should they do (esp. if they are 'at risk')?
 - b. What advice do you have for people wanting to get more information? Where should they go and how should they evaluate what they find?
 5. Your recommendation for improved fact circulation (starting from what you see, not your fantasy of perfect information flow).

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.