

ENVH 572: Environmental Risk and Society

Autumn 2014

ENVH 572 is intended for graduate students who wish to better understand the social and cultural context of scientific risk assessments of environmental and occupational health hazards. ENVH 572 will be offered concurrently with ENVH 472. Students enrolled in ENVH 572 are expected to complete all of the requirements for ENVH 472. In addition, these students will meet with the instructor one hour per week to analyze and discuss risk-related documents that have been developed by advocacy or special-interest groups. Each student will be responsible for producing a detailed critique of at least one such document. In addition to the learning objectives listed for ENVH 472, at the end of the course the student will be able to

1. Apply principles and concepts associated with risk assessment, risk perception and risk communication to advocacy and special-interest literature.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in regard to how the writings of advocacy or special-interest groups distort or misuse scientific information to promote a particular agenda.
3. Demonstrate in-depth knowledge and original insight regarding a major piece of advocacy or special-interest literature.

Assignments

- Complete all assignments required for ENVH 472.
- Submit a 5-8 page written report on one advocacy/special interest document
- Make an oral presentation on one advocacy/special-interest document to the instructor and other 572 students
- Read and discuss reviews of advocacy/special-interest documents prepared by other students
- Participate in a group presentation on advocacy/special-interest literature to students enrolled in ENVH 472

Grading

- 572 discussions, oral presentations and written report (20%)
- 472 written assignment and presentation – individual/team project (25%)
- Midterm exam (20%); final exam (30%); homework (5%)

Readings

The theme proposed for this assignment is ‘the organic food controversy’. We will examine the health risk/benefits of organic vs. conventional food production. The following are examples recent advocacy/special-interest writings. Specific assignments will be made in consultation with the instructor.

- “The Assault Against Organics”. *Sound Consumer*, September 2014
http://www.pccnaturalmarkets.com/sc/1409/The_Assault_on_Organics.html?utm_source=soundconsumer&utm_medium=editorial&utm_content=url&utm_campaign=sc%20articles
- “Organic Schmorganic”. *Slate*, January 2014.
http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/the_kids/2014/01/organic_vs_conventional_produce_for_kids_you_dont_need_to_fear_pesticides.html
- “The Case for Organic Fruits and Veggies”. *Environmental Working Group*, February 2014.
<http://www.ewg.org/enviroblog/2014/02/case-organic-over-conventional-fruits-and-veggies>
- “Why Consumers Pay More for Organic Food?”. *Academics Review*, April 2014.
<http://academicsreview.org/2014/04/why-consumers-pay-more-for-organic-foods-fear-sells-and-marketers-know-it/>