Politics of Environmental, Health, and Safety Regulation

Course Overview

The planet is warming, species are dying, and cancer and terrorists are everywhere. If you are alive there is no way you can avoid hearing about these and many other threats to the environment and human health and safety. How do you – and, as importantly, how does our government – figure out which claims of harm to respond to and how to respond to them?

This course will provide answers to these questions, and, more importantly, teach you how to get answers on your own. You will be immersed in scientific and political controversies at the interface of science, public policy, and law as a way of introducing you to how our government, regulatory agencies, and non-governmental organizations use science to assess and regulate environmental, health, and safety risks.

We will learn how to analyze disputes among scientists and other experts. We will learn some of what is known about how risks are assessed and regulated in the U.S. And we will together have the opportunity to research further how environmental, health, and safety risks are assessed and regulated in the U.S. and Illinois.

Course Requirements and Class Participation

Your grade in this course will be based on class participation (including, for some of you, a PowerPoint presentation of your research), two short research papers (5 pages each), and a longer research paper (at least 10 pages added to a revised version of your second short research paper). Paper due dates and a brief description of paper requirements are provided below. Further description of what is required for the papers will be provided in class and on the course webpages.

Class participation will determine a very substantial portion of your course grade (40%). Most days that we meet we will be discussing our readings. So, you will be expected to have done the readings and be able to answer my questions about what was in the readings – what concepts the author used, and what they mean; what claims or arguments the author made; what methods and evidence the author used to support his or her claims or arguments. You should also be able to answer my questions about how the readings relate to other readings and topics we have covered. If you engage in these discussions and make a good attempt to answer my questions, you will
receive credit for participating in class discussion that day. If you do not participate and do not make a good attempt to answer my questions, you will receive no credit that day. For those of you who choose to do a PowerPoint presentation on your research, 25% of your participation grade will be determined by that presentation (which translates to 10% of your course grade).

At various points during the semester, I will announce opportunities to earn extra credit. These opportunities may include attending and writing about environment-related talks hosted by the Institute for the Study of the Environment, Sustainability, and Energy or law-related activities organized by the Pre-law Honors Society and/or law school.

**Required Readings**

Required readings for the course are on e-reserves (which can be accessed from a link on the course webpages) and in the following texts, available at the Holmes Student Center bookstore:


**Due Dates for Research Papers**

- **February 19**  
  Short Research Paper on the Politics of Science (5-7 pages; 20% of grade), due at beginning of class, Monday

- **March 26**  
  Short Research Paper on Risk Assessment and Regulation, Installment #1 (5 pages; 15% of grade), due at beginning of class, Monday

- **May 7**  
  Final Research Paper on Risk Assessment and Regulation, Installment #2 (at least 10 pages added to a revised version of your second short research paper; 25% of grade), due at beginning of finals period, Mon., 2-3:50 p.m.

**Short Research Paper on the Politics of Science**

The requirements for this paper will be provided on the course webpages and will be discussed in class (due February 19th; worth 20% of your course grade).

**Research Papers on Risk Assessment and Regulation**

Research papers are due in two installments on the dates given below. Paper requirements are outlined here; further guidance will be given in class and in a study guide on the course webpages. *Research papers should answer these three questions:*

1. How is the risk defined and assessed?
2. Who regulates the risk?
3. How is the risk regulated?
For Research Paper Installment #1 (due March 26th; worth 15% of your course grade):

- Choose a risk the assessment and regulation of which you wish to study from a list of environmental, health, safety, and other risks that I will provide. If the assessment and regulation of the risk you want to study has been previously studied by a student, I will get you a copy of their research paper so that you can build on it in your paper. (We will discuss this in class.)
- Write five (5) pages beginning to answer questions 1-3 listed above. Use the study guide to identify what information is missing from existing student papers that needs to be added to improve their papers. In some cases, my comments on student papers are available as further guidance on what is needed to improve them.

For Research Paper Installment #2 (due May 7th; worth 25% of your course grade):

- Respond to my comments on Installment #1 by making revisions or taking the paper in the direction I advise.
- Write at least 10 pages beyond the five pages written for Installment #1, more fully answering questions 1-3. Integrate revisions to your five page paper with the 10 plus additional pages, and turn in the five page paper with my comments so that I can see how you have incorporated them into your final paper. Again, if you are building on the work of other students, use the study guide and any comments I may have made on the prior work by students to go beyond what they were able to do.

Please do not…

- ask for extensions on turning in your papers. Papers will be graded down one third of a grade per day that they are late.
- ask for an incomplete in the course unless you have a very, very compelling reason to do so

Definitely do not…

- engage in “academic misconduct,” defined by the NIU Student Judicial Code as the “receipt or transmission of unauthorized aid on assignments or examinations, plagiarism, unauthorized use of examination materials, or other forms of dishonesty in academic matters.”

Department of Political Science Announcements

Statement Concerning Students with Disabilities

Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center. Any student requiring an academic accommodation due to a disability should let his or her faculty member know as soon as possible. Students who need academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability will be encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center if they have not done so already. The Disability Resource Center is located in the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 [v], 815-753-3000 [TTY] or email at drc@niu.edu
Undergraduate Writing Awards

The Department of Political Science recognizes, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies, such as independent studies or honors theses. Winners are expected to attend the Department’s spring graduation ceremony where they will receive a certificate and a check for $100.00. No more than two papers may be submitted by a student. There is no requirement as to the length of papers submitted for the award. Often the Department awards prizes for both an outstanding short paper and an outstanding long paper. The number and types of award is dependent upon the papers submitted for consideration in any given year. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Only papers written in the previous calendar year are considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year’s competition even if the student has graduated. Papers can be submitted by students or faculty and must be supplied in triplicate to the undergraduate secretary. All copies must have two cover pages – one with the student’s name and one without the student’s name. Papers are not to be stapled or bound. Instead, please use paper clips. Papers are generally due in March and notice of call for papers and submission deadlines will be published on the Department’s Facebook page. You may also contact the department for information at 753-1015.

Department of Political Science Web Site

Undergraduates are encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to http://polisci.niu.edu. For the most up-to-date information on scholarships, internships, and other department news, I encourage you to “like” the department on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/NIU.PoliticalScience) or follow us on Twitter (@niupols).

Plus/Minus Grading System

Grading symbols that may be used from Fall 2013 onwards for undergraduates are these: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, D, and F. No other grade options were endorsed by the University Council.

Graduate students will continue to be evaluated using the Graduate School grading system that was implemented in Fall 2012. That system differs from the Undergraduate grading scale because the Graduate school grading options also include the symbol C-, a grade that is not part of the undergraduate grading symbols.

Frequently Asked Questions information from the NIU Registration and Records website is available at: http://www.niu.edu/regrec/grading/gradingfaqs.shtml

Departmental Classroom Decorum Statement Adapted for this Course

Students are to arrive at class on time. Students are to remain for the entire session unless excused
by the professor beforehand or confronted with a serious personal emergency. For instance, it is not acceptable for students to walk in and out of class to answer cell phones, take casual bathroom and smoking breaks, or attend to other personal matters. Cell phones, pagers, or any electronic devices that make noise must be turned off during class unless the instructor has been notified beforehand of a special circumstance (e.g., sick family member, pregnant wife, special childcare situation, etc.). No one should talk while someone else is talking; this includes comments meant for a classmate rather than the entire group. What may seem like a whisper or a harmless remark to one person can be a distraction to someone else, particularly in a small room. Overall, classroom dialogue and behavior should always be courteous, respectful of others, and consistent with the expectations set forth by the university.

Reading Assignments and Discussion Topics

WEEK 1 True Warnings and False Alarms

NOTE: NO CLASS MONDAY, JANUARY 15, MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

Overview of Course Coverage and Requirements


WEEK 2 Bjorn Lomborg and The Skeptical Environmentalist


WEEK 3 The Scientific Debate on Climate Change


WEEK 4 How Do We Know What We Know? Understanding the Politics of Science


WEEK 5 Learning from the Controversy over The Skeptical Environmentalist


Please Note: You are welcome but NOT expected to read all of the articles in this special issue of Environmental Science and Policy. Please read:


AND


OR

WEEK 6 NIU Project on Risk Regulation Regimes in the U.S., Illinois, and Europe

Short Research Paper (5-7 pages) on the Politics of Science due Monday, February 19th, beginning of class (in hardcopy and posted to discussion board)


WEEK 7 How Do We Know What’s Dangerous? The Media, Culture, & Risk Perception


WEEK 8 Why Do We Regulate Risks As We Do? Science, Culture, & Environmentalists


WEEK 9  NO CLASS MARCH 11-18TH, SPRING BREAK

WEEK 10 Science and Politics in Risk-Based Decision Making at the EPA


WEEK 11 EPA’s Regulatory Tools and Innovations

Short Research Paper on Risk Assessment and Regulation, Installment #1 (5 pages) due Monday, March 26th, beginning of class (in hardcopy and posted to discussion board)


WEEK 12 The President, Congress, and Environmental Policy


WEEK 13 The Courts, Adversarial Legalism, and Environmental Policy

PRESENTATIONS AND PEER REVIEW OF YOUR RESEARCH


WEEK 14 State and Local Environmental Policy

PRESENTATIONS AND PEER REVIEW OF YOUR RESEARCH


WEEK 15 How Does Regulation Matter? Corporate Environmental Performance, Part 1

PRESENTATIONS AND PEER REVIEW OF YOUR RESEARCH


WEEK 16 How Does Regulation Matter? Corporate Environmental Performance, Part 2

PRESENTATIONS AND PEER REVIEW OF YOUR RESEARCH


WEEK 17 PRESENTATIONS AND PEER REVIEW OF YOUR RESEARCH

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE AT BEGINNING OF FINAL EXAM PERIOD, MONDAY, MAY 7TH, 2-3:50 P.M.