

## COMM 3332: RISK COMMUNICATION

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

As strategic or public communicators, we are often charged with the task of communicating risk to the public. Sometimes we must communicate to an uninterested audience, to urge them to take a risk more seriously; at other times we must communicate to an outraged public looking for answers in times of crisis. This course will build your knowledge of risk communication theory and research, and it will provide you with the skills to effectively communicate risk and build a risk communication plan. Using active learning strategies (course discussions, in-class exercise and simulations), we will discover more about what constitutes risk, how people assess and perceive risks, and the factors that influence whether or not people take action to protect against risks. Through in-depth investigations of actual risk communication scenarios and campaigns we will explore the factors that contribute to effective and ineffective risk communication and influence, and the role of the media in influence risk perceptions and actions to protect against risk.

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Articulate the concepts of risk and risk perception, including why some people may view certain things as risky while others don't.
2. State the various individual, social and cognitive factors (based on theory) that influence individual decisions to engage in risky behaviors or take actions to avoid risks.
3. Describe the role of communication across the various phases of a risk management and articulate theory-based "best practices" for each phase.
4. Develop a comprehensive, theory-based risk communication plan that provides a communications and messaging strategy to inform and educate the public about a risk.
5. State how the principles of "choice architecture" can be used to indirectly influence or nudge individuals to make certain decisions or choices to reduce their risk.
6. Articulate the role of media (traditional, mass and social media) in communicating and amplifying risk, based on key theories and case study examples.

### Course Content

A class module will be created for each course meeting in canvas that may include (a) required or optional readings or media viewings, (b) writing activities to be completed prior to class, (c) personal assessments or other activities to be completed prior to class. These modules will be available for viewing up two weeks prior to each class and will be rolled out over the semester. Although this will vary, allow 1-2 hours to complete each module prior to class. Any activities posted within a module are due by class time, unless noted.

#### Instructor

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Drop-Ins: Thurs. 12-2 PM

#### Class Times

*Section 0020:* 2:20-3:40

Hayes Hall 006

*Section 0010:* 3:55-5:15

Baker Systems 394

**REQUIRED TEXTS/READINGS**

- Fischhoff, B. and Kadavy, J. (2011). *Risk: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford. (“F&K”)
- Thaler, RH and Sunstein, CR (2009). *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth & Happiness*. London: Penguin books. (“T&S”)
- Lundgren and McMakin (2013). *Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety and Health Risks*. (Available as an eBook through OSU library. Chapters will also be placed in Canvas in the appropriate modules) (“L&M”)
- Additional readings (journal and popular press articles) will supplement the course textbooks and will be included in course modules, as noted below.

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

The following is a list of assignments for this course and the weight of each assignment. **There are 500 total points for this class.** Grade information is always available on Carmen, and will serve as final grade for the course. Should you have any questions or concerns in regards to assignments or grades, please stop by my office during drop-in hours or before/after class. I will offer at least one extra credit research opportunity during the semester, TBD.

**Exams (40%, 200 points)**

Final Grade	Percentage
A	93-100%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%
D	60-66%
E	Less than 60%

There will be a midterm and final exam in this course. You will be tested on information from all aspects of the course (course readings, lectures and class discussions) for each exam. To help you prepare, I will provide a study guide and an in-class review to help you prepare. Exams may be multiple choice, true/false and/or short essay. Each exam will be worth 100 points.

**Risk Communication Plan (20%, 100 points)**

You will act as an independent risk communication consultant to develop a professional, comprehensive risk communication plan. You will be asked to conduct a thorough risk assessment for a potential hazard, known risk or risk situation of your choosing (i.e., physical environmental or health risk, social risk, financial risk, etc.) and present a theory-based plan for risk communication including specific message strategies and example communications for your target audience.

**Risk “Nudge” Poster (15%, 75 points)**

We will read and discuss the book *Nudge*, which presents a non-traditional, science-based approach to help people avoid risk. A nudge is an “indirect suggestion” made to influence people to behave in ways to lower or avoid risk. Based on concepts from the book, you will be asked to design a “nudge” to supplement your risk communication plan. On a large-format poster you will describe and illustrate your nudge, connecting it to principles from the book. You will be assessed on the presentation of your nudge visually and verbally, as well

as your interaction with other students doing our interactive poster session. Guest judges will determine the top three nudges and their designers will receive ten points of extra credit, as well as a cool prize!

### Attendance (10%, 50 points)

With certain exceptions (exams or exam reviews), I will take attendance every class period using Top Hat. Top Hat is online system whereby you use your phone, tablet or phone to acknowledge your class attendance. Days that attendance will be taken are noted with an “a” on the course schedule. *You may miss up to TWO classes without a loss of attendance points. After that, you will lose three points for every class (noted with an “a” on the course schedule) that you miss.* See course policies below for more specific information.

### Reflection Activities (5%, 25 points)

You will be asked to complete several small reflection activities (worth 2-5 points each) throughout the semester, to help you process course materials and prepare you for course discussion. These assignments may be distributed in class, or they may be part of your weekly course model. **Responses are due by class time. For each assignment you will receive full points for the assignment, half points, or no points.** Below is a table describing how these assignments will be credit.

<b>Full Credit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondent completely finishes the activity.</li> <li>• Respondent appears to have put considerable effort into his/her response.</li> <li>• Respondent offers unique and insightful thoughts/analysis/questions.</li> <li>• Response accurate reflects course concepts and materials for the day.</li> <li>• Response is written clearly.</li> </ul>
<b>Half Credit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondent attempts the activity and puts form some effort.</li> <li>• Respondent meets minimum requirements stated in the prompt.</li> <li>• Response does not reflect course material or concepts.</li> <li>• Response is simply a restatement of readings or other materials, with no reflection.</li> <li>• Response is comprehensible, but not well written.</li> </ul>
<b>No Credit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondent does not complete the assignment OR does not respond appropriately.</li> <li>• Respondent appears to have put <i>little to no effort</i> into his/her response.</li> <li>• Respondent does not provide reflection on course topics.</li> <li>• Response is poorly written and/or not comprehensible.</li> </ul>

### Discussion Participation (10%, 50 points)

If you’ve taken my classes before, you know that I value dialogue; my preference to explore course concepts through discussion and activity learning, versus lecture alone. Verbalizing course concepts and theories is one of the best ways to learn new material, and our shared stories and insights provide a rich context for the theories and constructs discussed throughout the course. To help encourage and incentivize discussion participation among all students, I will assess your participation in class discussions several times during the semester, which you will be notified of in advance. Just because you aren’t assessed on a given day doesn’t mean you shouldn’t participate, it just means you don’t have to worry about getting evaluated on that day. With the exception of a university-excused absence, personal/family emergency or sickness (with documentation), if you take are absent

on a day you are scheduled to be evaluated, you will receive a score of zero. If you are absent for an excused reason, I will ask you to “make up” the discussion participation on another day.

A detailed grading rubric follows. I want to emphasize the importance of “quality” as much as “quantity.” You don’t have to talk all the time to receive a “high participation” score; in fact, you are better off contributing a few high quality, topic-relevant comments that show you did the reading than many low quality, personal observations or stories that don’t illustrate your understanding of the reading.

<b>High Participation (5)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant offers solid analysis, without prompting, to move the conversation forward.</li> <li>• Participant, through their comments, demonstrates a deep knowledge of the text.</li> <li>• Participant has come to the seminar prepared and it is clear they did the reading.</li> <li>• Participant, through their comments, shows that they are actively listening to others.</li> <li>• Participant offers clarification and/or follow-up that extends the conversation.</li> </ul>
<b>Some Participation (3)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant offers some analysis, but needs prompting from the instructor.</li> <li>• Through comments, participant demonstrates a general knowledge of the text.</li> <li>• Participant is less prepared and does not appear to have read materials closely.</li> <li>• Participant is actively listening to others, but does not follow-up on others’ comments</li> <li>• Participant relies more upon their opinion, and less on the readings or materials.</li> </ul>
<b>No Participation (0)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant is not present in class.</li> <li>• Participant offers little or no commentary.</li> <li>• Participant comes to the seminar ill-prepared with little understanding of the topic.</li> <li>• Participant does not listen to others, offers no commentary.</li> <li>• Participant distracts the group by interrupting or offering off topic questions or comments.</li> <li>• Participant is using technology and not engaging in the discussion.</li> </ul>

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Attendance & Participation**

Attendance is *critical* in this class and will be taken daily. Attendance will be taken using the Top Hat system through which students are required to check-in using a personal device (cell phone, laptop, etc.). Students are responsible for checking in on their own and any attendance or technology issues with the Top Hat system should be addressed by the second week of class. If you forget to check-in, or you arrive after the Top Hat Code has been taken down, you could lose your attendance point for that day. Attendance will be taken every day, except where noted on the syllabus (e.g., exam and review days). If you forget your phone or laptop on a particular day, just let me know and I can check you in.

*Everyone in the class will have 2 “vacation days” that can be used in the event you need to miss a class, for whatever reason and you not lose attendance points for those two days.* Absences for university-excused absences or for personal/family illnesses or emergencies (with proper documentation) will not count against you, but you must let me know before class or within 48 hours of missing the class (via email is fine). For things such as a family get-together or vacation, or getting scheduled to work, you would need to use a vacation day. If you leave class early you may also lose your attendance points for that day.

Each day you miss beyond your two vacation days will result in a loss of 2 attendance points. The records in Top Hat will serve as the official attendance record and you may check your attendance online (or with me) anytime. Additionally, if you miss a class you are responsible for getting notes and information missed from your fellow classmates. *You may not use a free day to miss an exam or in-class presentation*; if you are not there for these assignments you will receive zero points on the assignment. Also, if you choose to take a vacation day on a day that you are being graded on your participation in discussion, you will receive a score of zero (0) for that day. For planning purposes, I will pass around a sheet at the beginning of the semester for you to indicate times when you're going to be gone.

### **Make-up Exams**

Make-up exams will be arranged for university-excused or unavoidable circumstances (e.g., deaths, personal/family illness and emergencies) with prior notification and/or written verification within 48 hours of your return. If you are not present in a class when an exam is given and/or do not have the proper documentation, you will not be allowed to make up the exam.

### **Late Assignments**

Assignments must be handed in on time. Unless specified, assignments are due at the specified time in the place listed on the assignment sheet (usually online). If you take a vacation day on the day that an assignment is due, you are still expected to turn in your assignment on time. A 10% score deduction will be taken for every day that your assignment is late.

### **Grade Disputes**

I happy to revisit grades and to discuss my evaluation of your work with you! Grade change requests can be made in-person or via email. Please be ready to outline where you believe you should have received additional points, how many points you should have received, and why this is the case.

### **Technology Use**

Technology is welcomed in this course. I understand the value of having computer access in the classroom, and may even ask you bring a computer on occasion, but I reserve the right to institute a technology policy if your usage becomes problematic or distracting to the class. I also reserve the right to ask everyone to "unplug" or put away technology for the day if I see students using technology for non-class purposes. *Misusing technology could also negatively affect your participation grade if you're not engaged and/or participating in class.*

### **Plagiarism**

All work in this course is to be individually developed. Using another person's writing or thoughts without giving them credit, using large verbatim sections of information from the work of another, or submitting something you have written for another class is considered plagiarism. If unsure, give credit to your source or talk to me about it. Students who plagiarize will be penalized and reported to university officials. You will also receive a grade of zero for the assignment where plagiarism occurred.

## Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct ([http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/info\\_for\\_students/csc.asp](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/info_for_students/csc.asp)).

## Disability Services

Students with disabilities that will be appropriately accommodated and you should inform me as soon as possible of your needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

## Statement on Diversity

The School of Communication at The Ohio State University embraces and maintains an environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages, experiences, and people. Our commitment to diversity moves beyond mere tolerance to recognizing, understanding, and welcoming the contributions of diverse groups and the value group members possess as individuals. In our School, the faculty, students, and staff are dedicated to building a tradition of diversity with principles of equal opportunity, personal respect, and the intellectual interests of those who comprise diverse cultures.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

This schedule includes a tentative list of topics, readings and assignment due dates. In addition, I have created a module for each class (by date and topic) in Canvas. The class module contains more detailed information about the topic, readings, activities and reflection assignments. **You are responsible for checking the class module prior to class!** Modules will be posted at least two weeks in advance. Failure to review a class module may result in you missing a reflection assignment or reading, which could negatively influence your discussion participation score.

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings
1	8/23	An Introduction to Risk	
	8/25 <sup>a,d</sup>	Introductions, Course Overview & Syllabus	
2	8/30 <sup>a,d</sup>	Risk & Risk Perception	F&K Chapter 2 (Defining Risk), F&K Chapter 5 (Risk Perception)
	9/1 <sup>a,d</sup>	Lay vs. Expert Perception of Risk <i>Mental Models, Psychometric Paradigm, Prob. Bias</i>	F&K Chapter 3 (Analysing Risk)
3	9/6 <sup>a,d</sup>	Cognitive & Affective Dimensions of Risk	Reading posted in class module. (Slovic et al, 2004)

	9/8 <sup>a,d</sup>	Risk and Decision-Making (Part 1) <i>Uncertainty Management, Utility Theory &amp; Prospect Theory</i>	F&K Chapter 4 (Risk Decisions)
4	9/13 <sup>a,d</sup>	Risk and Decision-Making (Part 2) <i>Health Behavior Theories (e.g., HBM, Integrated Model, EPPM)</i>	Readings posted in class module.
	9/15 <sup>a,d</sup>	Discussion of Vaccine Wars Introduction to Risk Communication	F&K Chapter 6 (Risk Comm.)  View Frontline's "Vaccine War" (link in class module).
5	9/20 <sup>a,d</sup>	Theories and Models of Risk Communication (e.g., CERC, Situational Theory of Publics, Deliberative Process Model, Actionable Risk, Precaution Adoption) Review Risk Communication Plan Assignment	Readings posted in class module.  Please review communication plan assignment info in module.
	9/22 <sup>a,d</sup>	Developing Effective Risk Communication: Determine your Purpose & Analyze your Audience	L&M Chapter 7 L&M Chapter 8  Add'l reading in class module (Con Agra Case Study ( <i>Sellnow, Ulmer, Seeger, Littlefield (2009)</i> ))
6	9/27 <sup>a,d</sup>	Developing Effective Risk Communication: Message Development & Testing	L&M Chapter 9 L&M Chapter 10 L&M Chapter 12
	9/29 <sup>a,d</sup>	Communicating Risk Visually	Reading posted in class module. (Lipkus, 2007)
7	10/4	Exam Review Day & Risk Plan Meetings	
	10/6	<b>Exam #1</b>	
8	10/11 <sup>a</sup>	Lessons learned from "Contagion"	View "Contagion" Film (link in class module).
	10/13	<i>No Class – Fall Break</i>	
9	10/18 <sup>a,d</sup>	Risk Communication Plan Work Day	

	10/20 <sup>a,d</sup>	Literacy, Numeracy & Understanding Risks	<b>RCPs due 10/21 (Fri.) by 12 PM.</b>
10	10/25 <sup>a,d</sup>	Introduction to <i>Nudge</i> (this section has a heavy reading load – start early!)	T&S Introduction (pages 1-14)
	10/27 <sup>a,d</sup>	<i>Nudge</i> Part 1 : Defining a Nudge	T&S Chapters 1-5
11	11/1 <sup>a,d</sup>	<i>Nudge</i> Part 2: Examples of Nudges	T&S Chapter 6 T&S Chapter 11 T&S Chapter 12 T&S Chapter 16
	11/3 <sup>a,d</sup>	Nudge Poster Work Day/Individual Meetings	
12	11/8	Nudge Poster Session	<b>Nudge posters due in class.</b>
	11/10 <sup>a</sup>	Social Amplification: “The Day After Tomorrow”	View “The Day After Tomorrow” (link in class module)
13	11/15 <sup>a,d</sup>	Media Portrayals of Risk <i>Societal Risk Reduction Model</i>	Reading posted in class module (Rutsaert et al., 2013)
	11/17 <sup>a,d</sup>	Social Construction & Amplification of Risk	F&K Chapter 7 (Risk, Culture...)  Addt'l reading in class module (Strekalova, 2016)
14	11/22 <sup>a,d</sup>	Risk Information Seeking <i>Selective Exposure &amp; RISP</i>	View lecture in class module.
	11/26	<i>Thanksgiving Break – No Class</i>	
14	11/29 <sup>a,d</sup>	Risk + Hazard = Outrage	Readings posted in class module (Peter Sandman)
	12/1 <sup>a,d</sup>	Putting It All Together: The West Virginia Water Case	Readings and media coverage links in class module.
15	12/6	Final Exam Review Day	
FINAL S	12/9 or 12/14	<b>Final Exam</b>	

<sup>a</sup> days that attendance will be taken.

<sup>d</sup> days that discussion participation grades will be assessed