

COMM 3332: RISK COMMUNICATION

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Communicating hazards and risks to the public is often a task of communication professionals. This course will build your knowledge of risk communication theory and research, as well as provide the skills to build effective risk communication plans and messaging. Using active learning strategies, we will discover what constitutes a risk and the factors that influence whether people take action to protect against risks. Through in-depth investigations of existing campaigns and case studies, we will also explore the factors that contribute to effective risk communication and the role that media play in influencing risk perceptions and motivating risk protective actions.

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

1. Articulate the concepts of risk and risk perception.
2. State the various individual, social and cognitive factors that may influence individual decisions to protect against risks.
3. Articulate the role of media in communicating and amplifying risk.
4. Develop a comprehensive, theory-based risk communication plan to inform the public of risks and motivate risk protective action.
5. Evaluate the potential effectiveness of risk communication based on theory-based best practices.
6. State the principles of “choice architecture” used in Nudge, which can be used as a complement to traditional risk communication campaigns.

Instructor

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Office Hours:

Thurs. 10:30 AM-12:30
PM & by appointment

Class Time

3:55-5:15 PM T/Th
Evans Lab 2004

Note: Be sure to review the topic module in Carmen before each class!

COURSE MATERIALS

An online module will be created for each course meeting in Carmen that may include (a) required or optional readings or media viewings, (b) concept reflection activities or (c) other activities to be completed prior to class. These modules will be rolled out over the semester. Allow 1-2 hours to complete readings and activities prior to class. Any activities posted in the module are due by class time, unless noted.

Books

1. Fischhoff, B. and Kadvan, J. (2011). Risk: A Very Short Introduction. New York: Oxford. (labeled as “F&K”)
2. Thaler, RH and Sunstein, CR (2009). Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth & Happiness. (labeled as “T&S”)
3. Lundgren and McMakin (2013). Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety and Health Risks. (Chapters in Carmen, labeled as “L&M”)

Additional readings (journal and popular press articles), films and podcasts will be included in class modules.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

The following is a list of assignments for this course and points for assignment. Updated grade information is always available on Carmen. I will use the standard OSU grade percentages. Should you have any questions or concerns about assignments or your grade, please stop by office hours or make an appointment to talk with me.

Two Exams (100 points)

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 will be worth 50 points and will include multiple choice and true/false questions.

Risk Communication Plan (75 points)

You will be asked to conduct a thorough risk assessment for a potential hazard or risk 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 sample communication materials.

Nudge Poster (50 points)

We will read and discuss the book *Nudge*, which presents a more subtler approach to risk communication. Based on concepts from the book, you will be asked to design a “nudge” to supplement your risk communication plan. A Nudge is an indirect suggestion made to move individuals towards decisions to help protect them against risks. Putting healthy food options front and center in the cafeteria, for example, is way to gently nudge individuals to make better food choices. On a large-format poster you will describe and illustrate your idea for Nudge, connecting it to principles from the book. You will be assessed on the presentation of your nudge, as well as your interaction with other students.

Reflection Activities (30 points)

You will be asked to complete several reflection activities (worth 2-5 points each) throughout the semester, to help you process course materials and prepare for assignments. **These activities will be posted in the class modules and are due by the class time for which they are assigned. Assignments turned in late will receive no credit.** For each assignment you will generally receive full points for the assignment, half points, or no points. Below is a table describing how these assignments will be graded.

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| Full Credit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondent completely finishes the activity. • Assignment is turned in on time. • Respondent appears to have put considerable effort into his/her response. • Respondent offers unique and insightful thoughts/analysis/questions. • Response accurately reflects course concepts and materials for the day. • Response is written clearly. |
| Half Credit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondent attempts the activity and puts forth some effort. • Assignment is turned in on time. • Respondent meets minimum requirements stated in the prompt. • Response does not reflect course material or concepts. • Response is simply a restatement of readings or other materials, with no reflection. • Response is comprehensible, but not well written. |

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| <p>No Credit</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondent does not complete the assignment OR does not respond appropriately. • Assignment is turned in during/after class time. • Respondent appears to have put <i>little to no effort</i> into his/her response. • Respondent does not provide reflection on course topics. • Response is poorly written and/or not comprehensible. |
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Attendance (20 points)

With certain exceptions (work days or exam reviews), I will take attendance every class period using Top Hat. 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 FIVE points for every class (noted with an “a” on the course schedule) that you miss. See course policies below for more specific information about attendance.*

Participation (20 points)

In my classes I value dialogue, and my preference is to explore course concepts through discussion and activity learning versus lecture. Verbalizing course concepts and theories is one of the best ways to learn new material, and our shared insights provide a rich context for the theories and constructs discussed throughout the course. To encourage discussion participation among all students, **I will assess your participation TWICE during the semester** (10 points each time).

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| <p>High Participation (8-10 points)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant offers solid analysis, without prompting, that contributes to conversation. • Participant, through their comments, demonstrates knowledge of the text. • Participant has come to the seminar prepared. • Participant, through their comments, shows that they are actively listening to others. • Participant offers clarification and/or follow-up that extends the conversation. • Technology use is primarily for class purposes and not a distraction to others. |
| <p>Some Participation (4-8 points)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant offers some analysis, but needs prompting from the instructor. • Participant some, but not extensive knowledge of the assigned readings/viewings • Participant is somewhat prepared and does not appear to have read materials. • Participant is actively listening to others, but does not follow-up on comments • Participant relies more upon their opinion, and less on the readings or materials. • Participant often arrives late or leaves early. • Participant’s technology use is distracting and/or not for class purposes. |
| <p>Little to No Participation (≤ 3)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant is often not present in class. • Participant misses most of class or leaves early. • Participant offers little or no commentary in class. • Participant comes to the seminar ill-prepared with little understanding of the topic. • Participant does not listen to others, offers no commentary in discussions. • Participant distracts the group by interrupting or offering off topic comments. • Participant is using technology and not engaging in the discussion. |

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance & Participation

Attendance is *critical* in this class and will be taken regularly. Attendance will be taken using the Top Hat. 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 may not receive attendance points 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. For activities such as job interviews, a family get-together or vacation, getting scheduled to work, routine or non-emergency health appointments, you would need to use a vacation day. You also may not use a vacation 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.

Each day you miss beyond your two vacation days will result in a loss of 5 attendance points. The records in Top Hat serve as the official attendance record and you may check your attendance online anytime. Occasionally Top Hat doesn't record your attendance, or you forget to sign in. In the event that occurs, please let me know (in class) and I can correct it in the system. However, corrections must be requested within TWO weeks of the date where the error occurred with documentation that you attended that class.

Make-up Exams and Presentations

Make-up exams and presentations will be arranged for university-excused or unavoidable circumstances (e.g., deaths, personal/family illness and emergencies) with prior notification or written verification, within 72 hours of your absence. If you are not present in a class during an exam or presentation, and you do not have the proper documentation, you will not be allowed to make it up.

Late Work Policy

Reflection activities must be completed by class time (no exceptions). If you turn in your risk communication or nudge posters more than a day late I will grade it for full credit only in situations where (1) the assignment was late due to unavoidable circumstances and (2) you let me know about your situation within 48 hours of missing the deadline. If you do not turn something in, and you don't communicate with me within 48 hours of missing the deadline, you will receive zero points.

Grade Disputes

I am happy to revisit grades and to discuss my evaluation of your work with you – just be ready to discuss where and why you believe you should have received additional points and how many points you should have received. I will also set aside class time to review exams with you.

Technology Use

Technology is allowed 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 call on you in class if you are not participating because of technology and/or ask everyone to “unplug” or put away technology for the day if I see students using technology for non-class purposes (i.e., texting, doing work for other classes, using social media or surfing the web). Furthermore, using technology inappropriately 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. When grading in Carmen I use Turnitin, which will alert me to potential plagiarism. Plagiarism includes using another person’s writing without giving them credit, using large verbatim sections of the work of another person or online source (even a public source) or submitting something you have written for another class. If you are unsure, please 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).

Disability Services

Students with disabilities will be appropriately accommodated. Please 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

| Week | Dates | Topic | Readings/Assignments Due |
|-------------|-------------------|---|--|
| 1 | 8/21 | Course Overview & Syllabus | Review Course Syllabus |
| | 8/23 ^a | Introduction: Case of Freedom Industries | Read articles in class module Read L&M, Chapter 1 |
| 2 | 8/28 ^a | Risk vs. Crisis Communication | View the film "Contagion" Review 4 Types of Risk Comm. PDF Reflection Activity #1(5 points) |
| | 8/30 ^a | Risk & Risk Perception | Read F&K, Chapter 2 (Defining Risk) Read F&K, Chapter 5 (Risk Perception) Reflection Activity #2(2 points) |
| 3 | 9/4 ^a | Lay vs. Expert Perception of Risk (Mental Models, Psychometric Paradigm) | Read F&K, Chapter 3 (Analyzing Risk) |
| | 9/6 ^a | Cognitive & Affective Dimensions of Risk | Read Slovic et al. 2005 PDF Listen to "Overcome by Emotion" Reflection Activity #3 (3 points) |
| 4 | 9/11 ^a | "Vaccine Wars" Discussion Introduction to Risk Communication Planning | View "Vaccine War" in class module. Read F&K, Chapter 6 (Risk Comm.) |
| | 9/13 ^a | RCP Step 1: Risk Assessment | Read Arvai (2014) PDF Reflection Activity #4 (3 points) |
| 5 | 9/18 ^a | Risks & Decision-Making: Part 1 (PAPM, Expected Utility) | Read F&K, Chapter 4 (Risk Decisions) |
| | 9/20 ^a | Risks & Decision-Making: Part 2 (Behavioral Theories) | Read Gielen and Sleet (2003) PDF, plus optional readings in the online module. |
| 6 | 9/25 ^a | RCP Step 2: Determining Your Purpose | Read L&M, Chapter 7 Reflection Activity #5 (3 points) |
| | 9/27 | Risk Communication Plan Work Day | |
| 7 | 10/2 | Exam Review Day | |
| | 10/4 ^a | Exam #1 | Participation Assessment #1 |
| 8 | 10/9 ^a | RCP Step 3: Audience Analysis (<i>Part 1</i>) | Read L&M, Chapter 8 |

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| | 10/11 | No Class – Fall Break | |
| 9 | 10/16 ^a | RCP Step 3: Audience Analysis (Part 2) The Case of Con-Agra | Read ConAgra Case PDF Reflection Activity #6 (3 points) |
| | 10/18 ^a | Social Construction & Amplification of Risk | View the film “Day After Tomorrow” Then, read Leiserowitz (2004) PDF Reflection Activity #7 (3 points) |
| 10 | 10/23 ^a | RCP Step 4: Developing a Strategy (Part 1) | Read L&M, Chapter 9 Read Hanson et al. (2015) PDF |
| | 10/25 ^a | RCP Step 4: Developing a Strategy (Part 2) | Read L&M Chapter 10 Reflection Activity #8 (4 points) |
| 11 | 10/30 ^a | Communicating Risk Numerically & Visually | Read L&M, Chapter 6 (esp. p. 75 to end) Read Lipkus, 2007 PDF Reflection Activity #9 (2 points) |
| | 11/1 ^a | Writing Risk Messages (Rational/ Emotional Appeals & Gain/Loss) | Read Rothman et al. (2006) PDF |
| 12 | 11/6 | Risk Communication Plans Work Day | |
| | 11/8 ^a | Emergency Risk Communication (Online Module – No In-Class Meeting) | Due: Risk Communication Plan |
| 13 | 11/13 ^a | <i>Nudge</i> : In Introduction | Read T&S, Pages 1-14 |
| | 11/15 ^a | <i>Nudge</i> Part 1: Defining a Nudge | Read T&S, Chapters 1-5 |
| 14 | 11/20 ^a | <i>Nudge</i> Part 2: Example Nudges | Read T&S, Chapters 6, 11, 12, 16 Reflection Activity #10 (2 points) |
| | 11/22 | No Class – Thanksgiving | |
| 15 | 11/27 | Nudge Poster Work Day | |
| | 11/29 ^a | Nudge Poster Day | Due: Nudge Poster |
| 14 | 12/4 ^a | Final Exam Review | Participation Assessment #2 |
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| FINAL | 12/12 (4 PM) | Final Exam | |

^a days attendance will be taken.