

COMM 3332: RISK COMMUNICATION

Instructor

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Class Time

11:10-12:30 W/F
Journalism 342

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Communicating hazards and risks to the public is often a task of communication and public relations professionals. This course will build your knowledge of risk communication theory and research, including the individual and social factors that influence actions to protect against risks and the role of mass media. We will also explore the risk communication planning process, which will provide tools and strategies for developing and evaluating risk communication messages.

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES (ELOs)

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to:

- ELO 1. Compare and contrast concepts of hazard, risk and risk perception.
- ELO 2. Identify theory-based individual, social and cognitive predictors of risk behavior.
- ELO 3. Describe the role that media play in communicating and amplifying risks to the public as defined by theory.
- ELO 4. Critique the potential effectiveness of risk communication messages or campaign based on theory.
- ELO 5. Design a theory-based risk communication plan to inform and motivate risk protective action.
- ELO 6. Design a strategy based on a principle of “choice architecture” to incorporate in your communication plan.

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. Activities posted in the module are due by class time.

1. Fischhoff, B. and Kadvany, J. (2011). Risk: A Very Short Introduction. New York: Oxford.
* Available Free through the Library Website
2. Thaler, RH and Sunstein, CR (2021). Nudge: The Final Edition New York: Penguin Books.
3. Lundgren and McMakin (2013). Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety and Health Risks. * Available Free through the Library Website
4. Additional readings (journal and popular press articles), films and podcasts are linked in class modules.

OFFICE HOURS

Weekly office hours will be held on Zoom on Wednesday from 1-2 PM (also linked in Carmen):

<https://osu.zoom.us/j/7774933794?pwd=TXFrdXlVcUVkM0crY0p1dVk5RDVsUT09>

I can also stay after class to answer questions or talk about any concerns you have. If that day/time doesn't work for you to attend office hours, please email me to set up an appointment.

IN-PERSON COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Except where noted on the course schedule, most classes will be held in-person (unless the situation with COVID-19 changes). There will not be a regular option to attend this course online via Zoom, nor do I plan to record lectures, although I will always post my comprehensive lecture notes and/or slides on Carmen.

If you are not able to regularly attend class in-person, it may not be the right time to take this course in lieu of the attendance policy and the group project.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

The following is a brief list of assignments for this course and the points that are allotted for each. Comprehensive assignment and grade information is always available on Carmen. I will use the standard OSU grade scheme and will round up final grades (e.g. 92.5% would round up to 93%). 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. It's important to be proactive if you are concerned about your grade

Two Exams (100 points)

There will be an online midterm (50 points) and final exam (50 points) in this course. You will be tested on information from all aspects of the course (course readings, lectures, and class discussions). I will provide a study guide to help you prepare. You will be allowed your use your notes, but you will be given a time limit in which to take the exam. The exams will include multiple choice and true/false questions that ask you to both recall and apply the information to actual risk communication scenarios. *The exams will assess ELOs 1-4 & ELO 6.*

Risk Communication Plan (75 points)

You will be asked to conduct a thorough risk assessment for a potential hazard or risk of your choosing (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.

This assignment will assess ELO 5.

Nudge Idea Presentation (50 points)

We will read and discuss the book *Nudge*, which presents a subtler approach to motivate risk protection. 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. For this assignment you will be asked to develop a short presentation that describes and illustrates your idea for a 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. This share session will be held online, and you **MUST** be present to receive all the points for this assignment. *This assignment will assess ELO 6.*

Reflection Activities (60 points)

You will be asked to complete several reflection activities (worth 2-5 points each) throughout the semester, to help you process course material and prepare for assignments. *These assignments are designed to assess ELO 1-6* These activities will be posted in the class modules. **They are due by class time on the day for which they are assigned.** Below is a table describing how these assignments will be graded.

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| 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 during/after class 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. |
| No Credit | <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. |

Attendance (20 points)

With certain exceptions (i.e., workdays 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 FOUR 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. **Be sure to also review course policies below regarding attendance.**

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance & Participation

Attendance is *critical* in this class and will be taken regularly using Top Hat. Students are responsible for signing 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, arrive after the Top Hat Code has been taken down, or leave within the first 30 minutes of class, you may not receive attendance points for that day. Attendance will be taken every day, except when noted on the syllabus (e.g., exam and review days). If you don't have a way to log attendance on a particular day, just let me know and I can mark your attendance in the system.

Everyone in the class will have 4 “vacation days” that can be used in the event that you need to miss a class, for whatever reason -- you do not lose attendance points for those days. University-excused absences or absences due to personal/family illness (including COVID-19) or emergency will not count against you, but please let me know as you as you can. After one week, these absences may not be excused. For things such as job fairs or interviews, vacations, getting scheduled to work or routine health appointments, you will need to use a vacation day.

Each class you miss beyond your four vacation days will result in a loss of 5 attendance points. The records in Top Hat serve as the official attendance record. If Top Hat doesn't record your attendance or you forget to sign in,

please let me know and I can correct it in the system. **Top Hat attendance corrections must be requested within TWO weeks of the date it occurred.**

Top Hat Course: [Comm 3332 Hovick \(SPR23\)](#)

Top Hat Join Code: 539357

Late Work Policy

All assignments are due by the date posted on Carmen, but I will grade major assignments for full credit if you email me before or after the due date (within one week) to let me know that your work will be late. However, you could lose up to half of the points on weekly reflection activities if they are turned in late, as these are designed to help you process readings and concepts before our discussions in class. Any late work due prior to the midterm must be turned in by the midterm. Similarly, any late work after the midterm must be completed by the last day of class. After that, any outstanding assignments will convert to a score of 0.

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 on assignment 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 access in the classroom, and I may even ask you bring a computer or tablet on occasion, but I reserve the right to institute a technology policy if your usage becomes problematic or distracting to me or the class. I also reserve the right to call on you in class in you are not participating because of technology or ask everyone to “unplug” and put technology away.

Plagiarism

All work in this course is to be individually developed. 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 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.

Copyright Disclaimer

The materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection and are only for the use of students officially enrolled in the course for the educational purposes associated with the course. Copyright law must be considered before copying, retaining, or disseminating materials outside of the course.

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).

Title IX

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race). If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you may find the appropriate resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Melissa Mayhan, at titleix@osu.edu.

Instructor Illness or Absence

If your instructor is ill or must be absent, in-person sessions will be moved online to Zoom and/or recorded and posted online. You will be notified via email of this change and it will be posted on Carmen in the announcements.

Food Security

The Ohio State University is committed to ensuring that all students have access to adequate and healthy food. Any undergraduate or graduate student with a BuckID may confidentially use the Buckeye Food Alliance food pantries. No proof of need is required. The pantry is located in Lincoln Tower, Suite 150 (1800 Cannon Dr., Columbus, OH 43210). Check the website or call for current hours. <https://www.buckeyefoodalliance.org>, 614-688-2508.

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.

Mental Health Statement

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you or someone you know are suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614--292--5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614--292--5766, and 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1--800--273-TALK or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org. 614-292-5766.

Disability Accommodations

The university strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. In light of the current pandemic, students seeking to request accommodations (including COVID-19 related) may do so

through the university's request process, managed by Student Life Disability Services. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic, or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

CLASS SCHEDULE

| Week | Dates | Topic | Readings/Assignments Due |
|-------------|-------------------|---|---|
| 1 | 1/11 | Course Overview & Syllabus | Review Course Syllabus |
| | 1/13 ^a | Introduction to Risk Communication: The Case of Freedom Industries | Read case study articles in class module Read L&M, Chapter 1 |
| 2 | 1/18 ^a | Risk vs. Crisis & Emergency Communication | View the film “Contagion” Review Sandman’s 4 Types of Risk Comm (PDF) & CERC Guide Reflection Activity on Contagion Film |
| | 1/20 ^a | Risk & Risk Perception | Read F&K, Chapter 2 (Defining Risk) Read F&K, Chapter 5 (Risk Perception) Reflection Activity: Encountering Hazards |
| 3 | 1/25 ^a | Lay vs. Expert Perception of Risk (Mental Models, Psychometric Paradigm) | Read F&K, Chapter 3 (Analyzing Risk) |
| | 1/27 ^a | Social Construction & Amplification of Risk | View the film “Day After Tomorrow” Read Leiserowitz (2004) Reflection Activity: Social Amplification of Climate Change |
| 4 | 2/1 ^a | Cognitive & Affective Dimensions of Risk | Read Slovic et al. (2005) Listen to “Overcome by Emotion” Reflection Activity: Overcome by Emotion |
| | 2/3 ^a | “Vaccine Wars” Discussion Introduction to Risk Communication Planning | View “Vaccine War” in class module. Read F&K, Chapter 6 (Risk Comm.) Review Risk Communication Plan Assignment Sheet |
| 5 | 2/8 ^a | Risk Communication Planning Step 1: Risk Assessment | Review EPA guide to risk assessment. Reflection Activity: Topic Planning |
| | 2/10 ^a | Risk & Decision-Making, Part 1 (General Theory) | Read F&K, Chapter 4 (Risk Decisions) |
| 6 | 2/15 ^a | Risks & Decision-Making, Part 2 (Theories of Behavior Change) | Read Gielen & Sleet (2003) – sections marked on the PDF Reflection Activity: Quiz on Gielen & Street (2003) |
| | 2/17 ^a | Risk Communication Planning Step 2: Determining Your Purpose | Read L&M, Chapter 7 Reflection Activity: Determining a Purpose Reflection Activity: Setting Objectives and Goals (due after class) |
| 7 | 2/22 | Catch-Up & Exam Review [online] | |

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| | 2/24 | Midterm Exam [online] | |
| 8 | 3/1 ^a | Risk Communication Planning Step 3: Audience Analysis (Part 1) | Read L&M, Chapter 8 Reflection Activity: Quiz on Chapter 8 |
| | 3/3 ^a | Risk Communication Planning Step 3: Audience Analysis (Part 2) – Case Study & Workshop | Read ConAgra Case PDF Reflection Activity: Audience Analysis |
| 9 | 3/8 ^a | Risk Communication Planning Step 4: Developing a Strategy | Read L&M, Chapter 9 Read L&M Chapter 10 Reflection Activity: Strategy Development Reading Quiz |
| | 3/10 ^a | RCP Step 4: Developing Strategy Continued | Reflection Activity: Risk Comm Plan Strategies & Key Messages |
| 10 | 3/15 | SPRING BREAK | |
| | 3/17 | SPRING BREAK | |
| 11 | 3/22 ^a | Writing Risk Messages Rational/ Emotional Appeals & Framing | Read Rothman et al. (2006) View: Your Brain is Wired for Negative Thoughts. |
| | 3/24 ^a | Communicating Risk Numerically & Visually | Read L&M, Chapter 6 (p. 75 to end) Read Lipkus, 2007 PDF Reflection Activity: Sample Materials |
| 12 | 3/29 | Risk Communication Plan Workday [online] | |
| | 3/31 ^a | Nudge: In Introduction | Due: Risk Communication Plan Read T&S, Pages 1-20 (Introduction) |
| 13 | 4/5 ^a | Defining a Nudge | Read T&S, Chapters 1-5 |
| | 4/7 ^a | Ideas for Incorporating Nudges into Risk Communication Planning | Read T&S, Chapters 8, 9, 13, 14 Reflection Activity: Nudge Idea Generation |
| 14 | 4/12 | Nudge Idea Workday [online] | |
| | 4/14 | Nudge Idea Presentations 1 | Due: Nudge Idea Presentation |
| 15 | 4/19 | Nudge Idea Presentations 2 | |
| | 4/21 | Final Exam [online] | |

^a day that attendance will be taken.