

COMM 3332: RISK COMMUNICATION

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Instructor

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Class Time

2:20-3:40 Mon/Wed
 Ramseyer Hall 009

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.

COURSE MATERIALS

An online module will be posted before 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. The textbooks used in this course are listed below.

1. Fischhoff, B. and Kadvary, J. (2011). Risk: A Very Short Introduction. New York: Oxford.
 * Available Free through the Library Website
2. Lundgren and McMakin (2018). Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety and Health Risks. * Available Free through the Library Website
3. Additional readings (journal and popular press articles), films and podcasts are provided in class modules.

OFFICE HOURS

Weekly Office hours will be held on Wednesday from 12-2 PM in Derby 3149

If those days/time do not work for you to attend office hours, please email me to arrange an appointment. I will also generally leave a few minutes at the end of class for questions or short meetings.

IN-PERSON COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Except where noted, classes will be held in-person. There will not be an option to attend this course online. I will also not record and post my lectures. *If you are not able to regularly attend this class in person, it is not the right time to take the course. Your grade will also suffer if you don't attend regularly.*

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.

Two Exams (100 points)

There will be two exams in this course (each worth 50 points each). You will be tested primarily on information from class lectures and discussions). I will provide a study guide and review session to help you prepare and you will be allowed to use your printed/written paper notes when taking 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 assess ELOs 1-4 & ELO 6.*

Two-Part Risk Communication Plan (100 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. To help make this project more manageable, you will submit your plan in two parts. *This assignment will assess ELO 5.*

Reflection Activities (80 points)

You will be asked to complete several reflection activities (worth 3-5 points each) throughout the semester to help you process course material and prepare for assignments. Some of these activities will be posted in the class module ahead of time for you to complete on your own (called “out of class” reflections) and other times they will be submitted or started in class (called “in-class” reflections). See the course schedule for more information about when these assignments are due. If you miss class on a day when an in-class activity was assigned, you will lose points for that activity unless you have an excused absence or complete it within 24 hours of it being posted. *These assignments are designed to assess ELOs 1-6.*

Participation (20 points)

In lieu of a formal attendance grade, I will assess your participation at two points in the semester (5 points each), coinciding with changes in your small groups. Participating in class is one of the best ways to learn course material, and our shared stories and insights provide a rich context for the theories and research discussed throughout the course. Below are my expectations for high, medium, and low participation. I assess at three points in the semester so that you may adjust your participation over the course of the semester.

High Participation (8-10 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student is physically present for most classes (unless excused) • Student is listening and fully engaged in course lectures. • Student is focused only on course materials in class. • Technology is used to assist in learning and is not as a distraction from class. • Student fully participates in group activities and discussions. • Student offers questions and commentary in class. • Student listens fully to others • Student comes to class prepared with an awareness of assigned readings, viewings, or materials.
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Medium Participation (4-7 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student is not physically present for several classes (without an excused absence) • Student is distracted or disengaged during class lectures. • Student occasionally focuses on non-course materials or assignments in class. • Technology is mostly used to assist in learning and not as a distraction from class. • Student is somewhat engaged in group activities or discussions • Student occasionally offers questions and commentary in class. • Student listens to others somewhat. • Student sometimes comes to class unprepared, lacking an awareness of assigned readings, viewings, or materials.
No/Low Participation (1-3 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student misses most classes (without an excused absence) • Student is completely disengaged during course lectures. • Student often focuses on non-course materials or assignments in class. • Technology is often used as a distraction from class. • Student has exceptionally low engagement in group activities or discussions. • Student does not offer questions or commentary in class. • Student does not listen to others. • Student comes to class unprepared, lacking an awareness of assigned readings, viewings, or materials.

COURSE POLICIES

Class Attendance and Participation

Class attendance and participation is important in this course; if you miss a class, you may lose the opportunity to turn in an in-class reflection assignment. Additionally, as noted above, not attending class will affect your participation grade. Furthermore, you may make up in-class assignments only if you (a) missed a class due to personal acute illness, personal or family emergency, or had university-excused absence *and* (b) you notified me within 48 hours of missing. Missing class for work, volunteer opportunities, internship responsibilities, job interviews, exams in other classes (including preparing/studying for other exams), non-emergency or routine healthcare appointments, family get-togethers, and personal vacations would not be excused. To assist me in calculating participation grades, I will take attendance in most classes.

Small Groups

You will be assigned to small groups in this course. You are expected to sit near members of your group and to complete in-class reflection assignments together in class. I will change the groups after the first exam to give you a chance to interact and meet with others in the course. You are expected to interact and work with your group members, not complete tasks, or use technology independently.

Late Work Policy

All assignments are due by the date posted on Carmen. **I will grant each student a “no questions asked” assignment extension ONE time during the semester.** If you wish to use your extension, send me an email or message in Carmen to *let me know if you plan to use it before the assignment is due*. Otherwise, if you miss assignments, you are not allowed to make them up unless you have an excused absence (and contact me no later than 48 hours after missing).

Grade Disputes

I am happy to revisit grades on any assignment and discuss my evaluation of your work with you. Should you wish to discuss your grade, please message me your concerns and we will find a time discuss outside of class. Be ready to discuss where and why you believe you should have received additional points on an assignment. I especially welcome your feedback on written assignments, quiz, and exam questions.

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 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.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

There has been a significant increase in the popularity and availability of a variety of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT, Co-Pilot, Gemini, and others. These tools will help shape the future of work, research, and technology, but when used in the wrong way, they can stand in conflict with academic integrity at Ohio State.

All students have important obligations under the Code of Student Conduct to complete all academic and scholarly activities with fairness and honesty. Our professional students also have the responsibility to uphold the professional and ethical standards found in their respective academic honor codes. Specifically, students are not to use unauthorized assistance in the laboratory, on field work, in scholarship, or on a course assignment unless such assistance has been authorized specifically by the course instructor. In addition, **students are not to submit work without acknowledging any word-for-word use and/or paraphrasing of writing, ideas or other work that is not your own.** These requirements apply to all students undergraduate, graduate, and professional.

To maintain a culture of integrity and respect, generative AI tools should not be used in the completion of course assignments unless the instructor specifically authorizes their use. Furthermore, these tools should be used only with the explicit and clear permission of each individual instructor, and then only in the ways allowed by the instructor. *There will be assignments in this course where you are allowed to use AI to complete certain tasks. However, you should not be using AI to summarize weekly readings or viewings, answer quiz and exam questions, or write papers for this course.*

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

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the [Committee on Academic Misconduct](#) (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University's [Code of Student Conduct](#), and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's Code of Student Conduct and this syllabus may constitute Academic Misconduct.

The Ohio State University's Code of Student Conduct (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University or subvert the educational process. Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination. Ignorance of the University's Code of Student Conduct is never considered an excuse for academic misconduct, so please review the Code of Student Conduct and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct.

If an instructor suspects that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, the instructor is obligated by University Rules to report those suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. If COAM determines that a student violated the University's Code of Student Conduct (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in the course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

If students have questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, they should contact the instructor.

Religious Accommodations

Ohio State has had a longstanding practice of making reasonable academic accommodations for students' religious beliefs and practices in accordance with applicable law. In 2023, Ohio State updated its practice to align with new state legislation. Under this new provision, students must be in early communication with their instructors regarding any known accommodation requests for religious beliefs and practices, providing notice of specific dates for which they request alternative accommodations within 14 days after the first instructional day of the course. Instructors in turn should not question the sincerity of a student's religious or spiritual belief system in reviewing such requests and shall keep requests for accommodation confidential.

With sufficient notice, instructors will provide students with reasonable alternative accommodations with regard to examinations and other academic requirements with respect to students' sincerely held religious beliefs and practices by allowing up to three absences each semester for the student to attend or participate in religious activities. Examples of religious accommodation can include, but are not limited to, rescheduling an exam, altering the time of a student's presentation, allowing make-up assignments to substitute for missed class work, or flexibility in due dates or research responsibilities. If concerns arise about a requested accommodation, instructors are to consult their tenure initiating unit head for assistance.

A student's request for time off shall be provided if the student's sincerely held religious belief or practice severely affects the student's ability to take an exam or meet an academic requirement and the student has notified their instructor, in writing during the first 14 days after the course begins, of the date of each absence. Although students are required to provide notice within the first 14 days after a course begins, instructors are strongly encouraged to work with the student to provide a reasonable accommodation if a request is made outside the notice period. A student may not be penalized for an absence approved under this policy.

If students have questions or disputes related to academic accommodations, they should contact their course instructor, and then their department or college office. For questions or to report discrimination or harassment based on religion, individuals should contact the [Civil Rights Compliance Office](#).

Instructor Illness or Absence

If the instructor is ill or 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.

Intellectual Diversity

Ohio State is committed to fostering a culture of open inquiry and intellectual diversity within the classroom. This course will cover a range of information and may include discussions or debates about controversial issues, beliefs, or policies. Any such discussions and debates are intended to support understanding of the approved curriculum and relevant course objectives rather than promote any specific point of view. Students will be assessed on principles applicable to the field of study and the content covered in the course. Preparing students for citizenship includes helping them develop critical thinking skills that will allow them to reach their own conclusions regarding complex or controversial matters.

Grievances and Solving Problems

According to University Policies, if you have a problem with this class, you should seek to resolve the grievance concerning a grade or academic practice by speaking first with the instructor or professor. Then, if necessary, take your case to the department chairperson, college dean, or associate dean, and to the provost, in that order. Specific procedures are outlined in Faculty Rule 3335-8-23. Grievances against graduate, research, and teaching assistants should be submitted first to the supervising instructor, then to the chairperson of the assistant's department.

Creating an Environment Free from Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct

The Ohio State University is committed to building and maintaining a welcoming community. All Buckeyes have the right to be free from harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct. Ohio State does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, pregnancy (childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom), race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or protected veteran status, or any other bases under the law, in its activities, academic programs, admission, and employment. Members of the university community also have the right to be free from all forms of sexual misconduct: sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation.

To report harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, or retaliation and/or seek confidential and non-confidential resources and supportive measures, contact the Civil Rights Compliance Office (CRCO):

Online reporting form: <http://civilrights.osu.edu/>
Call 614-247-5838 or TTY 614-688-8605
civilrights@osu.edu

The university is committed to stopping sexual misconduct, preventing its recurrence, eliminating any hostile environment, and remedying its discriminatory effects. All university employees have reporting responsibilities to the Civil Rights Compliance Office to ensure the university can take appropriate action:

- All university employees, except those exempted by legal privilege of confidentiality or expressly identified as a confidential reporter, have an obligation to report incidents of sexual assault immediately.
- The following employees have an obligation to report all other forms of sexual misconduct as soon as practicable but at most within five workdays of becoming aware of such information: 1. Any human resource professional (HRP); 2. Anyone who supervises faculty, staff, students, or volunteers; 3. Chair/director; and 4. Faculty member.

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 by dialing 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Disability Accommodations

The university strives to maintain a healthy and accessible environment to support student learning in and out of the classroom. If students anticipate or experience academic barriers based on a disability (including mental health and medical conditions, whether chronic or temporary), they should let their instructor know immediately so that they can privately discuss options. Students do not need to disclose specific information about a disability to faculty. To establish reasonable accommodations, students may be asked to register with Student Life Disability Services (see below for campus-specific contact information). After registration, students should make arrangements with their instructors as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that accommodations may be implemented in a timely fashion.

If students are ill and need to miss class, including if they are staying home and away from others while experiencing symptoms of viral infection or fever, they should let their instructor know immediately. In cases where illness interacts with an underlying medical condition, please consult with Student Life Disability Services to request reasonable accommodations.

CLASS SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

IC=In Class Assignment (Due During/After Class), OC=Out of Class Assignment (Due by Class Time)

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings/Assignments Due
1	1/12	Course Intros & Syllabus	Review Course Syllabus
	1/14	Why Effective Risk Communication Matters	News Readings/Viewings in Class Module Read L&M, Chapter 1 (Introduction) Reflection Activity 1: Freedom Industries (IC)
2	1/19	MLK Day – NO class	
	1/21	Risk vs. Crisis Communication	View “Contagion” Film Review Sandman’s Types of Risk Comm (PDF) & CDC’s Crisis and Emergency Risk Guide Reflection Activity 2: Contagion (IC)
3	1/26	Risk & Risk Perception	Read F&K, Chapter 2 (Defining Risk) Read F&K, Chapter 5 (Risk Perception) Reflection Activity 3: Encountering Hazards (OC)
	1/28	Lay vs. Expert Perception of Risk (Mental Models, Psychometric Paradigm)	Read F&K, Chapter 3 (Analyzing Risk) Reflection Activity 4: Ranking Risks (IC)
4	2/2	Risk Communication Consequences: Two Case Studies	News Readings/Viewings in Module Reflection Activity 4: Case Studies (IC)
	2/4	Social Construction & Amplification of Risk	Read L&M, Chapter 2 (Approaches to Communicating Risk) pages 11-20 (just “cross cutting approaches”) Reflection Activity 6: Social Amp Case Study (IC)
5	2/9	Cognitive & Affective Dimensions of Risk (Risk as Analysis, Risk as Feelings)	Read Slovic et al. (2005) Listen to “Overcome by Emotion” Podcast Reflection Activity 7: Overcome by Emotion (IC)
	2/11	Intro to Risk Communication Planning (RCP) Part One: Risk Assessment	Review Risk Communication Plan Assignment Read F&K, Chapter 6 (Risk Comm.) Skim EPA Guide to Risk Assessment

6	2/16	RCP Part One: Risk Assessment Continued	Reflection Activity 8: Initial Risk Assess. (OC)
	2/18	Exam 1 Review & Preparation	
7	2/23	Exam 1	Participation 1 Assessment New Small Groups Assigned
	2/25	RCP Part 1: Audience Analysis	Read L&M, Chapter 8 (Analyze your Audience) Reflection Activity 9: Quiz on L&M Chap. 8 (OC)
8	3/2	RCP Part 2: Audience Analysis Continued	Reflection Activity 10: Audience Analysis (IC)
	3/4	Risk Decision-Making Theory 1 (Precaution Adoption Process Model, Expected Utility Theory, Prospect Theory)	Read F&K, Chapter 4 (Risk Decisions)
9	3/9	Risk Decision-Making Theory 2 (Integrated Model of Risk Communication)	Read Lim (2022), pages 1-8. Reflection Activity 11: Influencing Decisions (IC)
	3/11	RCP Part 1: Determine Purpose & Objectives	Read L&M, Chapter 7 (Purpose and Objectives) Reflection Activity 12: Purpose & Objectives (IC)
10	3/16	No Class – Spring Break	
	3/18	No Class – Spring Break	
11	3/23	Recap & Review RCP Part 1	Bring a draft of part one to class.
	3/25	RCP Part 2: Key Message & Strategy Development	Read L&M, Chapter 9 (Develop your Message) Risk Communication Plan (Part One) Due
12	3/30	RCP Part 2: Key Message & Strategy Development Continued	Read L&M Chapter 10 (Determine Appropriate Methods)
	4/1	RCP Part 2: Risk Message Design Guidelines and Theories (Fear/EPPM)	Read L&M, Chapter 6 (Principles of Risk Comm) Reflection Activity 13: Designing Effective Fear Appeals (IC)
11	4/6	RCP Part 2: Risk Message Design Guidelines and Theories Continued (Gain/Loss Frames)	Read L&M, Chapter 13 (Information Materials) Reflection Activity 14: Determining an Effective Risk Communication Message (IC)

	4/8	Presenting Numerical Information & Visuals in Risk Communication	Read L&M, Chapter 14 (Visual Representations) Read Lipkus (2007)
14	4/13	Risk Communication Planning Workshop	Reflection Activity 15: Sample Campaigns (OC)
	4/15	Exam #2 Review and Preparation	
15	4/20	Exam #2	Participation 2 Assessment
	4/22	Risk Communication Materials Review	<i>L&M Chapter 13 (information materials) Materials you have created must be brought to class for sharing and critique.—you should have a near final draft of these. Please bring tech for working on your materials/plans.</i> Reflection Activity 16 : Sample Materials Review (IC)
16	4/27	Risk Comm Plan Check-Ins	Risk Communication Plan (Part Two) Due