

# COMM 3332: RISK COMMUNICATION

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Effectively communicating hazards and risks to the public is a key skill for communication professionals. This course will build your knowledge of risk communication theory and research and ability to execute effective risk communication plans and messaging. Using active learning strategies, we will discover what constitutes a risk and the factors that influence people's decisions to take action to protect against risks. Through in-depth investigations of existing events, 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. Explain the concepts of hazard, risk and risk perception.
2. Describe 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. State the principles of "choice architecture" used in Nudge, which can be used as a complement to traditional risk communication campaigns.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of risk communication based on theory and research-based best practices.

## COURSE MATERIALS

An module will be created for each class in Carmen that may include: (a) required or optional readings and/or media viewings, (b) concept reflection activities or other activities to be completed prior to class, (c) online lectures and workshops, (d) links to quizzes and exams, and (3) assignment descriptions.

Class 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. Please be sure to leave enough time each week to review all readings/viewings!

### Class Time

11:10-12:30 PM W/F  
113 Drees Labs  
(and/or via Zoom)

### Instructor

Shelly Hovick, PhD  
Associate Professor  
3149 Derby Hall  
hovick.1@osu.edu

### Office Hours

I will stay on Zoom  
30 minutes after class.  
You can also email to  
make an appointment.

**Be sure to review the  
module in Carmen  
before each class!**

## MODE OF DELIVERY

This hybrid course will be presented 25% in-person and 75% online. However, all in-person lectures/workshops will also be delivered online via Zoom during our class time and recorded for later viewing; thus, **you always have the option (with no penalty) to join any class remotely or to view the lecture at a later date.** After 11/28, the University has mandated that all classes and exams will move online. Please see the course schedule and modules in Carmen for notes on class delivery.

## 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 two exams in this course administered online. 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. With the exception of a few theories/concepts, the second exam is non-cumulative. Exams will be worth 50 points and will include multiple choice and true/false questions. You will be allowed to use books and/or written and printed notes when taking the exams, but no online or electronic information. You will be given a window of time in which to take the exams online at your convenience.

### Risk Communication Plan

Your major assignment in this course is the development of a risk communication plan for COVID-19 (or another risk of your choosing), which you will submit in two parts. This plan will include a thorough assessment of the risk and plan for risk communication, including message strategies and sample communication. Guided workshop sessions will help you to work on, and receive feedback, over the course of the semester. Each part of the risk communication plan is worth 75 points.

#### Part One – Risk Assessment (75 points)

For part one, you will be asked to conduct a thorough risk assessment including a description of the risk and behaviors to lower risk. You will also conduct an extensive audience analysis, as well as identify communication goals and objectives for your campaign.

#### Part Two -- Risk Communication Plan (75 points)

For part two you will present a risk communication audit of past efforts and campaigns targeting the risk you chose. You will also present a theory-based plan for risk communication, including specific direct and indirect (nudging) message strategies, as well as a sample communication material for the campaign.

### Weekly Reflection Activities (100 points)

You will be asked to complete several reflection activities (worth 2-10 points each) throughout the semester, to help you process course material and prepare for assignments. These activities might include short writing assignments, quizzes or discussion board posts. The activities will be posted in the class module and are due by the class time for which they are assigned. For each assignment you will generally receive full points, half points, or no points. Below is a table describing how the assignments will be graded. Please note that on these assignments I will generally not provide written feedback/comments to you on these short assignments.

<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 accurately 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 forth some effort.</li> <li>• Respondent meets minimum requirements stated in the prompt.</li> <li>• Response does not fully 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>• Assignment is turned in during/after class time.</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>

### Grading scale

93–100: A  
 90–92.9: A-  
 87–89.9: B+  
 83–86.9: B  
 80–82.9: B-  
 77–79.9: C+  
 73–76.9: C  
 70–72.9: C-  
 67–69.9: D+  
 60–66.9: D  
 Below 60: E

**Please note:** Carmen Canvas, OSU's grading and class management software, does not round fractions up. Please take that into account in computing grades. I typically do not manually round up grades.

### COURSE POLICIES

#### Student Participation

This course requires class participation at a high level, including contributing to class discussions. Although I will not formally assess attendance and participation this semester, I expect you to attend/view weekly lectures, complete reflection activities, participate in small group breakout sessions and complete course assignments.

#### Make-up Quizzes and Exams

All quizzes and exams will be taken online. Make-up exams will be arranged for university-excused or personal circumstances (deaths, personal/family illness and emergencies, etc.) with prior notification or written verification, preferably within one week of your absence.

#### Late Work

I will grade all assignments for full credit if you (a) let me know beforehand your assignment will be late or (b) let me know as soon as you are able after missing a deadline. I am willing to offer you some flexibility, particularly given the current situation with COVID-19, as long you communicate with me regarding your situation. If you do not communicate with me in a reasonable amount of time after missing a deadline, you may receive a zero on the assignment. Please note that all assignments must be turned in by 12/2, so that I can calculate final grades.

### **Grade Disputes**

I am always happy to revisit grades and discuss my evaluation of your work. Drop by office hours or send me an email to set up a time to chat about your grade. Please 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.

### **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 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](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/info_for_students/csc.asp)).

### **Disability Services**

The university strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. In light of the current pandemic, students seeking to request COVID-related accommodations 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](mailto:slds@osu.edu); 614-292-3307; [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu); 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

### **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**

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 are or someone you know is 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](http://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.

If you are thinking of harming yourself or need a safe, non-judgmental place to talk, or if you are worried about someone else and need advice about what to do, 24 hour emergency help is also available through the Suicide Prevention Hotline (Columbus: 614-221-5445 / National: 800-273-8255); or text (4hope to 741741); or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

### **COVID-19 AND ILLNESS POLICIES**

#### **Health and Safety Requirements**

All students, faculty and staff are required to comply with and stay up to date on all university safety and health guidance (<https://safeandhealthy.osu.edu>), which includes following university mask policies and maintaining a safe physical distance at all times. Non-compliance will be warned first and disciplinary actions will be taken for repeated offenses.

#### **Student Illness or Absence**

In the event you must quarantine because of exposure to someone diagnosed with COVID-19 OR you are feeling ill with COVID-19 symptoms, you will still be able to make progress in this class!

The quarantine plan for this course is that all lectures (including in-person lectures) will be delivered live via Zoom, as well as recorded and posted to Carmen. This means that you don't have to attend any class in-person, or even at the scheduled time, to participate and do well in this course.

If *you* are too ill to participate in this course due to COVID-19 or another illness, please contact me as soon as you are able prior to the next class meeting. All materials will be made available on Carmen, including lecture recordings and slides. Alternate assignments or extensions may also be arranged.

**Instructor Illness or Absence**

If the *instructor* is quarantined or is experiencing respiratory symptoms but is well enough to teach, the in-person sessions will be moved totally online to Zoom. You will be notified via email of this change the night before class.

If the *instructor* is too ill to teach the course for a period of time, the designated backup for this course (Dr. Hyunyi Cho) will step in.

You will be notified of any changes via email from me or the School of Communication.

**Campus Closure**

Should The Ohio State University Main Campus move to full online instruction due to closure, our in-person classes will be moved exclusively to Zoom (at our appointed class time).

**TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE**

*\* Indicates class will also be held in-person in addition to online via Zoom; however, in this class you always have the option to attend an in-person class online. I will also record all lectures and post them in Carmen to view later.*

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings/Assignments Due</b>
8/26*	Course Overview & Syllabus	Review: Course Syllabus Read: L&M, Chapter 1 (Introduction)
8/28*	Risk vs. Crisis Communication	View: Contagion (movie) Review: 4 Types of Risk Comm PDF Complete: Reflection Activity
9/2*	Risk & Risk Perception	Read: F&K, Chapter 2 (Defining Risk) Read: F&K, Chapter 5 (Risk Perception) Complete: Reflection Activity
9/4*	Lay vs. Expert Perception of Risk (Mental Models, Psychometric Paradigm)	Read: F&K, Chapter 3 (Analyzing Risk) & Risk Ranking Exercise for Class.
9/9*	Social Construction & Amplification of Risk	View: Day After Tomorrow (movie) Skim: Leiserowitz (2004) Complete: Reflection Activity
9/11*	Cognitive & Affective Dimensions of Risk	Read: Slovic et al. 2005 PDF Listen: Overcome by Emotion (podcast) Complete: Reflection Activity
9/16	Emergency Risk Communication	Read: Crisis, Emergency & Risk Communication (CERC) "Introduction," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) Read: L&M, Chapter 6 Complete: Reflection Activity
9/18	"Vaccine Wars" Discussion	View: "Vaccine War" Documentary
9/23	Introduction to Risk Communication Planning RCP Step 1: Risk Assessment	Read: F&K, Chapter 6 (Risk Comm.) Complete: Reflection Activity
9/25	Guided Risk Assessment Work Session	This is a guided work session. If attending class live, please come ready to complete the worksheet in the module.
9/30	Catch-Up & Exam Review Day	Review: Exam Review Sheet
10/2	<b>Exam #1 (Online)</b>	You may take the exam at any time on 10/2 (see module).
10/7	Risk & Decision-Making Part 1	Read: F&K, Chapter 4 (Risk Decisions)

10/9 & 10/14	Risks & Decision-Making Part 2 (Behavioral Theories)	Read: Gielen & Sleet (2003) – sections marked on the PDF
10/16	RCP Step 2: Determining Your Purpose	Read: L&M, Chapter 7 Complete: Reflection Activity
10/21	RCP Step 3: Audience Analysis	Read L&M, Chapter 8
10/23	RCP Step 3: Audience Analysis (continued)	Read: ConAgra Case (Sellnow, 2009) Complete: Reflection Activity
10/28	Guided Audience Analysis Work Session	This is a guided work session. If attending class live, please come ready to complete the worksheet in the module.
10/30 & 11/4	RCP Step 4: Developing a Strategy	Read: L&M, Chapter 9 Read: L&M Chapter 10 Complete: Reflection Activity  <b>Risk Communication Part 1 (Due 11/2)</b>
11/6	Nudge: A Risk Communication Strategy	Read: T&S (Nudge), Chapters 1-5 <i>Note: reading load is high this week</i> Complete: Reflection Activity
11/11	Incorporating Nudges/Choice Architecture	Read: T&S, Chapters 6, 11, 12, 16 <i>Note: reading load is high this week</i>
11/13	COVID Message Strategy Share & Critique	Complete: Reflection Activity
11/18	Writing Risk Messages Rational/ Emotional Appeals & Framing	Read: Rothman et al. (2006) PDF
11/20	Communicating Risk Numerically & Visually	Read: L&M, Chapter 6 (p. 75 to end) Read: Lipkus, 2007 PDF Complete: Reflection Activity
11/25*	Guided Strategy Work Session	This is a guided work session. If attending class live, please come ready to complete the worksheet in the module.  <b>Risk Communication Part 2 Due 12/1</b>
12/2*	Message Share & Exam #2 Review	
12/4	<b>Exam #2 (online)</b>	