Syllabus
Risk Communication
COMS 450
6:05-9:45 Tuesdays

Success: Everybody talks about it, but far too many people do little or nothing
to ensure their own personal success -- Paul J. Meyer

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The goal of this course is to explain how communication professionals can create and implement communication plans related to either possible or actual hazards (anything that can cause morbidity or mortality). While the goal of this course is to examine risk and crisis communication, it is designed to help you apply the information you have learned throughout your communication studies degree program at Ohio University. This course will draw on information you have learned in a variety of courses, such as persuasion, public speaking, small group, training and development, organizational communication, health communication, communication and campaigns, diffusion, research methods, and many others.

Required Texts:


Required Workbook/Reading Pack:

Learning Objectives:

1. Define the general terms related to the academic study of risk communication.

2. Explain the laws and governmental regulations that mandate organizational risk communication in the United States.

3. Explain how researchers determine risks in the world around us.

4. Explain what is meant by the terms “relative risk” and “risk reduction.”
5. Explain how consumers and risk communicators should be weary of “junk science.”

6. Read a number of case studies involving a variety of risks from both the health applied and organizational applied contexts.

7. Explain how and why lay and expert opinions about risks often differ.

8. Understand the historical nature of risk communication.

9. Understand how risk communicators can modify their messages and verbal/nonverbal delivery to have the most impact.

10. Develop and write risk and crisis communication plans.

11. Know some of the prominent social scientific theories that help researchers understand the risk communication process.

12. Understand the reasoning for the new push in public participation in the risk communication process.

13. Explain how a risk message can turn into a crisis message.

14. Understand the differences between risk and crisis messages.

15. Explain what can cause a crisis situation to occur.

16. Understand the best communicative strategies for handling a crisis situation.

17. Examine how 9-11 has transformed and changed both risk and crisis communication efforts in the United States.

Important Websites:
American Psychological Association’s Style website - http://www.apastyle.org
National Communication Association – http://www.natcom.org
OU School of Communication Studies - http://www.coms.ohiou.edu/
Research Methods Knowledge Base - http://trochim.human.cornell.edu/kb/
Virginia P. Richmond, Ph.D. – http://www.virginiapeckrichmond-phd.com
## GRADING

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## ASSIGNMENTS

- Two Tests
  - Midterm  _____________(15)
  - Final  _____________(20)

- Risk Analysis Paper  _____________(15)

- Risk Communication Campaign Paper  _____________(20)

- Crisis Communication Plan Analysis Paper  _____________(20)

- Class Participation & In-class activities  _____________(10)

- Extra Credit  _____________(X)

**TOTAL** _____________

- You should monitor your own grades. It is very helpful to know your standing in the course at any time during the quarter. Since the passing of the Buckley Amendment by Congress, I am not allowed to give grades over the phone or Internet. However, you may
inquire about your grades at anytime in person. Additionally, you may inquire in person about your final exam grade after you have received your quarter grade reports through the mail from the university.

**Course Procedures**

*Attendance*

Punctual attendance is expected at all class sessions, *especially* on test days. If you participate in University sponsored activities (e.g., intercollegiate sports), you must inform your instructor *before* you are absent. Ohio University policy regarding attendance will be followed. Students are responsible for all missed work.

*Learning Activities*

In-class learning activities must be submitted on time and *cannot* be made up at all.

*Makeup Tests*

If you miss a test, you must provide documentation to explain the absence in order to be considered for permission to make up the assignment. If you do not provide documentation for a missed test, you *cannot* make up the test. If you know that you will be forced to miss a test for school related reasons, please tell your instructor as far in advance as possible. Make up examinations will be individually scheduled between the instructor and the student on an as needed basis. Ultimately, makeup tests are at the discretion of the instructor.

*Late Work*

Papers will be collected during the first ten minutes of class. After the first ten minutes, any work turned in is considered late. Late work will receive an automatic letter grade reduction for every school day the work is late (weekends are not counted). In other words, work that is more than four days late is automatically failing.

*Course Readings*

All reading is expected to be done before you come to class. If it ever appears that reading is not being completed before class, the instructor reserves to the right to use quizzes as necessary to test reading.

*Extra Credit* is not guaranteed in this course, but if opportunities arise they will be announced in class.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**
Honesty and originality are expected in all the work you present in this class. Proper citation and documentation of others’ work is required on all oral and written assignments. Plagiarism, cheating, or unethical behavior of any kind will not be tolerated.

**AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT**
Any student, who, because of a disability, may require some special arrangements as prescribed by Ohio University Eastern in order to meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible to make necessary accommodations. Accommodations will be made, but I must be aware of your needs in order to make proper accommodations.

**Course Assignments**

**Midterm Examination and Final Examination**

There is a midterm examination and a final in this course. Your midterm will occur halfway through the course and the final will occur during the final testing period. The final will cover all material discussed in this course. These tests will be a combination of multiple choice and short answer/essay tests.

**COURSE PROJECT**

*Risk Analysis Paper*

The purpose of this paper is to take an actual hazard and perform a complete risk analysis of this hazard. You should pick a risk that is related to your communication track – health hazards for health communication and organizational hazards for organizational communication. Using any available research about your hazard, you will examine the following aspects of your hazard:

1) What is the rate of exposure of your hazard?
2) Who are the stakeholders involved in your risk?
3) What types of negative consequences occur as a result of exposure to the hazard?
4) What is the numerical quantification of the risk?
5) Are there any differing perceptions between experts and lay people about the hazard?
6) What is the expert mental model of the risk?
7) What is the common public mental model of the risk?
8) How do the models compare and contrast?

*Risk Communication Campaign Paper*
The purpose of this paper is to take the hazard you identified in the Risk Analysis Paper and develop a risk communication campaign. While the project is based on theoretical work conditions, your proposal for the campaign should be realistic and implementable. In other words, if you want to run television advertisements about your hazard, you should be able to supply me with a story board for the advertising campaign and a realistic budget for the campaign itself. If you want to use brochures, you will need to turn in sample brochure ideas along with a proposed budget. You can use any of the theoretical approaches to creating risk communication messages discussed in class.

Crisis Communication Plan Paper

Part one of this assignment is to create a crisis communication plan for either a health organization or a traditional profit organization. Use the examples of the crisis communication plans discussed in class when creating your plan.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note the schedule given on the first day of class is a tentative schedule and changes can be made at the instructor’s/course administrator’s discretion. To keep on top of any possible changes in the course schedule, regular attendance in class is necessary.

**Tentative Schedule of Course Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Content to be Covered</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Unit One: Introduction to Risk Communication</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Unit Two: Quantifying Risks</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Unit Three: Public Perceptions of Risks</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Unit Four: What is Risk Communication</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Unit Five: Risk &amp; Crisis Communication Plans</td>
<td>Risk Analysis Paper</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Unit Six: Public Participation in Risk Communication</td>
<td>Midterm Examination</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Unit Seven: Communication Variables that impact Risk</td>
<td>Risk Communication Campaign Paper</td>
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<td>Messages</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Unit Eight: Risk Communication Theory</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Unit Nine: From a Risk to a Crisis</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Unit Ten: Communicating Effectively During Emergencies</td>
<td>Crisis Communication Plan Paper Part 1</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Finals Week – Final Examination</td>
<td>Crisis Communication Plan Paper Part 2</td>
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COMS 450 Course Readings List

**Unit One: Introduction to Risk Communication**


Lundgren & McMakin – Chapters 1 “Introduction”; 3 “Laws that Mandate Risk Communication”; & 5 “Ethical Issues”

**Unit Two: Quantifying Risks**

**READ THESE FIRST**


READ THESE FIRST

THEN READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING


Unit Three: Public Perceptions of Risks


**Unit Four: What is Risk Communication**


Lundgren & McMakin – Chapters 2 “Approaches to Risk Communication” and 4 “Constraints for Risk Communication”

**Unit Five: Risk & Crisis Communication Plans**

Lundgren & McMakin – Part two “Planning the Risk Communication Effort” & Part three “Putting Risk Communication into Action”


**Unit Six: Public Participation in Risk Communication**


**Unit Seven: Communication Variables that impact Risk Messages**

Lundgren & McMakin –6 “Principles of Risk Communication”


**Unit Eight: Risk Communication Theory**


**Unit Nine: From a Risk to a Crisis**


**Unit Ten: Communicating Effectively During Emergencies**

Lundgren & McMakin – Part V – Bioterrorism & Other Emergencies
