

Risk



J620: Public Relations Planning and Theory (Spring 2009)

Risk communication includes drawing people's attention to risk and helping them mitigate it, as well as helping people feel comfortable with risk. We will explore the foundation of knowledge in both of these areas and apply it to various contexts, such as health and the environment. In addition, we will examine responses to situations in which expert perceptions of risk differ from public perceptions. To accommodate all class members, we will approach risk communication from both an institutional perspective and from an activist perspective. We will also examine risk communication through a critical lens as we explore ethical considerations.

Class Meetings
Friday: 9 a.m. to noon
Allen 307

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Office Hours

Tuesday: 11 a.m. to noon
Thursday: 11 a.m. to noon
1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
Friday: 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Communication



Course Objectives

- Appreciate the importance of cultural considerations in the development of risk messages
- Evaluate risk messages based on message design theories
- Identify ways to segment audiences for targeted risk communication campaigns
- Predict public opinions about risk based on cultural rationality and heuristics
- Assess the effectiveness of various responses to risk situations
- Describe ways to effectively involve the public in risk decisions
- Characterize ethical challenges in risk communication and evaluate response options
- Advance knowledge about risk communication in an area of your specialty

Books and Articles

“Effective Risk Communication: A Message-Centered Approach”
by Timothy L. Sellnow, Robert R. Ulmer, Matthew W. Seeger, and Robert S. Little
New York: Springer
ISBN: 978-0-387-79727-4

“Trust Us, We’re Experts! How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles With Your Future”
by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber
New York: Tarcher/Putnam
ISBN: 1-58542-139-1

Additional reading can be found on Blackboard:
<https://blackboard.uoregon.edu>

Assessment

Paper or project: 80 points

Grading criteria:

1. Content
2. Organization of thought
3. Writing skills

In general, late work would result in a one letter grade deduction per week that it is late.

Participation: 20 points

Participation is based on class preparation and meaningful contributions to class discussion each week (without dominating the discussion), respecting others’ opinions, e-mailing three discussion questions for each class, and being on time to class.

Book Review

You could review a book about risk communication in an area that interests you. This option is contingent upon finding a journal editor or book review editor who confirms their interest in having you submit a review of the particular book. Depending on the editor's time constraints, you would submit the book review for publication either during class or at the conclusion of spring quarter.

Evaluation of the first quarter of the book: 15 points
Evaluation of the second quarter of the book: 15 points
Evaluation of the third quarter of the book: 15 points
Evaluation of the fourth quarter of the book: 15 points
Final book review: 20 points

Special Requests

See me if you have concerns or special needs. I am happy to work with you.

Research Paper: Interviews, Focus Groups, or Both

For this option, you would write the first half of a research paper, collect part of your data, and transcribe your data. You could partner with classmates if you would like. If you work on a team, each team member would be responsible for conducting four interviews or two focus groups (or two interviews and one focus group).

Introduction (one to two pages): 5 points
Literature review and research questions (four to five pages): 15 points
Method (three pages): 15 points
Transcripts of four interviews or of two focus groups (per team member): 30 points
Final paper: 15 points
(Introduction, literature review, method, references, and transcripts as appendices)

Research Paper or Rhetorical Criticism

For this option, you could partner with classmates if you would like. If you write rhetorical criticism that does not have the traditional sections below, we would work out an alternative point system and timeline for deadlines.

Introduction (one to two pages): 5 points
Literature review and research questions or hypotheses (four to five pages): 15 points
Method (three pages): 15 points
Results: 15 points
Discussion (end by page 25): 15 points
Final paper: 15 points

Create A Project

Propose a project. For example, you could design risk communication materials, conduct message testing via focus groups, and write a report about the findings. Or you could write a communications crisis plan. Another option is to continue working on a risk communication paper.