

# JRMC 8170: Risk Communication

## Spring 2009

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### Course Description and Objectives

This course introduces you to the field of risk communication, a topic that has been receiving increased attention because of terrorism threats. Theories and research about risk communication come primarily from five domains: environmental disasters, personal risk-taking behaviors, industrial hygiene, terrorism, and crises of corporate reputation. This course will examine the theories, research, and practical applications of risk communication in each of those domains. At the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Articulate the five domains of knowledge that have created the field of risk communication.
2. Understand the key theories and research results from each of those domains.
3. Advise those dealing with a risk situation on effective principles for communication.
4. Critique the way risk communication has been handled in key crises.
5. Design an original study to contribute to the field of risk communication (Doctoral Students). Write a critique of a contemporary risk communication case.

### Course Policies

**Class participation:** Please arrive on time and turn off your cell phone when you enter class. I assume that a graduate seminar at the doctoral level is a community of scholars and each of us takes responsibility for the learning process. While I have provided some structure to the content, I do expect each person to contribute to the teaching of the class. For each seminar you will be asked to take responsibility for a specific part of the content, either bringing additional material to share or leading a discussion.

**Class attendance:** Class attendance and performance are strongly and positively correlated. The more regularly you attend, the better you will perform. Class attendance will be taken each day.

**Academic honesty:** “academic honesty is defined broadly and simply—the performance of all academic work without cheating, lying, stealing, or receiving assistance from any other person or using any source of information not appropriately authorized or attributed.” (From the preamble to “A Culture of Honesty”). The University, the department of Speech Communication, and the instructors take academic honesty very seriously. Every student at the University of Georgia should be familiar with the booklet “A Culture of Honesty: Policies and procedures on academic dishonesty.” This document has a thorough presentation of four types of academic dishonesty including plagiarism, unauthorized assistance, lying/tampering, and theft, as well as the procedures that are in place to adjudicate alleged incidents of academic dishonesty. The policies and procedures described in the booklet will be strictly followed.

**Miscellaneous:** The University of Georgia has clearly stated policies concerning changing the time of the final exam, class withdrawals, the condition under which a grade of “incomplete” may be received, and so forth. All such policies will be followed in this class.

**Reasonable Accommodation Policy:** Students with learning disabilities who may require accommodations should contact The Learning Disabilities Center at 706-542-7034. Reasonable accommodations will be determined on a case-by-case basis according to each student’s individual documentation.

## Grading

One exam given during the final examination period is worth 20% of your grade. This exam will be structured like a preliminary exam and will include essay items. Items on the exam will come from the readings and class lectures and discussions.

M.A students will be required to prepare a case study of the risk communication occurring during a crisis which will be worth 30% of your grade. The following topics are examples of possible case studies: H1N1 flu; childhood immunization; smoking; alar, radon, Three Mile Island, West Nile Virus, SARS, Anthrax, 9/11, Smallpox vaccinations, Exxon Valdez, Firestone/Explorer Tire, DC Sniper, and Virginia Tech shootings. Doctoral students will be required to prepare a grant proposal for risk communication research using NIH format and requirements. The following is one RFA that might be appropriate:

HHS

Department of Health and Human Services

National Institutes of Health

Behavioral and Social Research on Disasters and Health (R01)

Modification 1

<http://www.grants.gov/search/search.do?mode=VIEW&oppId=9881>

Both MA and PhD papers will be due **DEC. 1**. More details about these assignments will be provided on WEBCT.

Two additional short papers will be required in the course—one on applying a theory to a risk communication context and the other creating an original risk communication message. Each of these papers counts for 20% of the grade. The final 10% of your grade will be determined by your participation in general class discussions as well as your participation in any class projects.

## **Tentative Course Schedule**

(The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor or posted on Webct may be necessary)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic/Reading</b>
<b>AUG 18</b>	<b>Introduction to the course and CDCynergy and H1N1 pandemic</b>
<b>AUG 25</b>	<b>Overview of Risk Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emergency/Crisis/Risk Communication Definitions. CDCynergy: Risk Communication.</li><li>• Fearn-Banks, pp. 1-51 and 65-85.</li><li>• Sandman, P. (2003). Four kinds of risk communication, April, <i>The Synergist</i>. <a href="http://www.psandman.com">www.psandman.com</a></li><li>• McComas, K.A. (2006) Defining moments in risk communication research 1996-2005. <i>Journal of Health Communication</i>, 11, 75-91.</li></ul>
<b>SEPT. 1</b>	<b>Theoretical Perspectives on Risk Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Slovic, P. (1987). Perception of risk, <i>Science</i>, 236, 280-285.</li><li>• Kahlor, et al. (2003). Studying heuristic-systematic processing of risk communication. <i>Risk Analysis</i>, 23 (2), 355-368.</li></ul>

- Leppin, A. & Aro, A.R. (2009). Risk perceptions related to SARS and Avian Influenza: Theoretical foundations of current empirical research. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 16, 7-29,
- Witte, K. (1994). Fear control and danger control;: A test of the Extended Parallel Process Model. *Communication Monographs*, 61, 113-134.

**SEPT 8                      Risk Messages—Development & Evaluation**

- Altman, C.J., Bostrom, A., Fischhoff, B., & Morgan, M.G. (1994). Designing risk communications: Completing and correcting mental models of hazardous processes, part I. *Risk Analysis*, 14, 779-788
- Sandman, P. & Weinstein, N.D. (1993). Some criteria for evaluating risk messages, *Risk Analysis*, 13:1, 103-114. [www.psandman.com](http://www.psandman.com)
- Finucane, M.L., Alhakami, A., Slovic, P. & Johnson, S.M. (2000). The affect heuristic in judgments of risks and benefits. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 13, 1-17.
- Sandman, P. (2003). Beyond Panic Prevention: Addressing Emotion in Emergency Communication. Available at [www.psandman.com](http://www.psandman.com)

**SEPT 15                      Ethics and social justice in risk communication**

- Johnson, B.B. (1999). Ethical issues in risk communication. *Risk Analysis*, 19(3), 335-348.
- Stocking, S.H. (1992). Packaging risk: Lessons for students in PR and Journalism. *Journalism Educator*, 47(2), 26-31.
- Satterfield, T.A., Mertz, C.K., & Slovic, P. (2004). Discrimination, vulnerability, and justice in the face of risk. *Risk Analysis*, 24(1), 115-129.
- Vaughan, E. (1995). The significance of socioeconomic and ethnic diversity for the risk communication process. *Risk Analysis*, 15 (2), 169-180.

**SEPT 22                      Personal risk behaviors, e.g., smoking, alcohol, safe sex**

- Weinstein, N.D. (2004). Colon cancer: Risk perceptions and risk communication. *Journal of Health Communication*, 9, 53-65.

- Emmons, K.M., Wong, M., Puleo, E., Weinstein, N., Fletcher, R. & Colditz, g. (2004). Tailored computer-based cancer risk communication: Correcting colorectal cancer risk perception, *Journal of Health Communication*, 9, 127-141.
- Stephenson, M.T. & Palmgreen, P. (2001). Sensation seeking, perceived message sensation value, personal involvement, and processing of anti-marijuana PSAs, *Communication Monographs*, 68 (1), 49-71
- **Paper One Due**

**SEPT 29**

**Environmental Risk Communication**

- Fearn-Banks, Cases 7 & 8, 20 & 21
- Sandman, P. & Paden, M. (1979). At three mile island, *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August, 43-58. Available at [www.psandman.com](http://www.psandman.com).
- Sandman, P. (2004). Three mile island: 25 years later. Available at [www.psandman.com](http://www.psandman.com).
- Sellnow, T.L. & Seeger, M.W. (2000). Chaos Theory, Informational Needs, and Natural Disasters: Application of chaos theory to a natural disaster; crisis communication during the 1997 Red River Valley flood. On CDC Risk Communication CD.
- Sellnow, T.L. & Seeger, M.W. (2000). Exploring the Boundaries of Crisis Communication. On CDC Risk Communication CD.
- Sandman, P. (1994). Mass Media and Environmental Risk: Seven Principles. *RISK: Health, Safety and Environment*, Summer, 251-260. Available at [www.psandman.com](http://www.psandman.com).

**OCT 6**

**Community Involvement in Risk Communication**

- McComas, K.A. (2001). Theory and practice of public meetings, *Communication Theory*, 11(1), 36-55.
- Quigley, D., Handy, D., Goble, R., Sanchez, V., & George, P. (2000). Participatory research strategies in nuclear risk management for native communities, *Journal of Health Communication*, 5, 305-331.
- McComas, K.A. (2003). Public meetings and risk amplification: A longitudinal study, *Risk Analysis*, 23(6), 1257-1270.

**OCT 13**

**Emerging Infectious Disease & Pandemic Flu**

- Fearn-Banks, Cases 9, 18,19
- Freimuth, V. et al. (2000). Communicating the threat of emerging infections to the public, *Journal of Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 6 (4). At <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eid/vol6no4/freimuth.htm>
- [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) to read about pandemic flu
- [www.psandman.com](http://www.psandman.com) to read Sandman's commentaries on risk communication about pandemic flu

**OCT 20**

**Terrorism**

- Fearn-Banks, Case 6
- Fischhoff, B. Assessing and communicating the risks of terrorism. An examination of the psychology of risk, risk analysis and risk communication. Available on CDC Risk Communication CD.
- Thomas, P. (2003). The anthrax attacks. The Century Foundation. Available at [www.homelandsec.org/publications.asp?pubid=221](http://www.homelandsec.org/publications.asp?pubid=221)
- Freimuth, V.S. (2006). Order out of chaos: The self organization of communication following the anthrax attacks, *Health Communication*, 20 (2), 141-148.
- [www.psandman.com](http://www.psandman.com) for Sandman's articles and commentaries on the anthrax attacks
- Clarke, L. (2002). Panic: myth or reality? *Contexts, The American Sociological Association*, 1 (3). Available at [http://www.contextsmagazine.org/content\\_sample\\_v1-3.php](http://www.contextsmagazine.org/content_sample_v1-3.php)

**OCT 27**

**Field Trip to CDC to learn about the Emergency Communication System and to tour the Emergency Operations Center**

**NOV 3**

**PR/Crisis Communication**

- Fearn-Banks, Case 11, 12, 14
- Coombs, W.T. (1995). Choosing the right words: The development of guidelines for the selection of the appropriate crisis response strategies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 8(4), 447-476.

- Coombs, W.T. & Holliday, S.J. (1996). Communication and attributions in a crisis: An experimental study in crisis communication, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 8(4), 279-295.
- Coombs, W.T. (1998). An analytic framework for crisis situations: Better responses from a better understanding of the situation. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 10(3), 177-191.
- Tyler, L. (2005). Towards a postmodern understanding of crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 31(4), 566-571.
- **Paper Two Due**

**NOV 10**

**Using Social Media During a Crisis**

- Fearn-Banks, pp. 52-64
- Palen, L. (2008). Online social media in crisis events, *Educause Quarterly Magazine*, 31(3),

**NOV 17**

**Renewal**

- Fearn-Banks, Case 15
- Seeger, M.W., Ulmer, R.R., Novak, J.M. & Sellnow, T.L. (2005). Post-crisis discourse and organizational change, failure and renewal. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 18, 78-96.

**NOV 24**

**THANKSGIVING**

**DEC 1**

**Summary and Review for Examination**

- **Critique of risk communication or proposal due**

**FRIDAY, DEC 11.**  
3:30-5:30

**FINAL EXAMINATION**

**Textbook**

Fearn-Banks, K. (2007). *Crisis communications: A Casebook Approach* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Emergency Risk Communication CDCynergy available by  
<http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/> (If this web address fails, google cdcynergy and risk)

Recommended but not required: Morgan, M.G., Fischhoff, B., Bostrom, A. & Atman, C.J. (2002). Risk communication: A mental models approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Websites that may be of interest:

Peter Sandman [www.psandman.com](http://www.psandman.com)  
UGA's Southern Center for Communication, Health, and Poverty  
[www.southerncenter.uga.edu](http://www.southerncenter.uga.edu)  
CDC [www.cdc.gov/](http://www.cdc.gov/)  
University of Maryland's Risk Communication Center  
[www.comm.riskcenter.umd.edu/](http://www.comm.riskcenter.umd.edu/)  
Carnegie Mellon's Risk Communication Center  
[www.sds.hss.cmu.edu/risk/home.htm](http://www.sds.hss.cmu.edu/risk/home.htm)  
University of Pittsburg Center for Biosecurity [www.upmc-biosecurity.org/](http://www.upmc-biosecurity.org/)