RISK COMMUNICATION (JMC:3185:0004)  

Discussion Section: Wednesday 12:30 to 3pm  
Location: E254 Adler Journalism Building

Instructor: Professor Kajsa Dalrymple, kajsa-dalrymple@uiowa.edu  
Office: W339 Adler Journalism Building  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-4pm, Thursdays 10-11pm, or by appointment  
SJMC DEO: David Ryfe, david-ryfe@uiowa.edu, E305 AJB

Course overview:  
This course examines risk as a central concept in the communication process. Since risk is intrinsically an interdisciplinary concept, the course will rely on literature from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives, such as communication, psychology, sociology and formal risk analysis.

Case studies will be drawn from a wide range of issues and cultural contexts, including environmental, technological or health risks; food safety risks; international military crisis or threats of terrorism; and natural disasters. A particular emphasis will be given to the comparison of the European and American contexts.

There are two main goals for this course. The first goal is to give an overview of all aspects of strategic communication in the context of risk, and to examine questions, such as: How do people perceive risks and how do they make decisions in high-risk situations? How does mass media cover risk, and what impact does that coverage have on public perceptions? What are strategies for addressing risk-related issues during a campaign?

The second goal is to stimulate ideas for original work in the field of risk communication. Toward this end, each student will be expected to be sufficiently familiar with the field, in general, and an area of the literature in particular, to propose an original campaign of their own choosing at the end of the semester.

SJMC Learning Goals:

1) Students will develop critical thinking skills to analyze and interpret media messages through an understanding of media practices and institutions.
2) Students will demonstrate sensitivity to and understanding of the cultures, histories, perspectives, and socio-economic and political situations of diverse groups.
3) Students will demonstrate an ability to anticipate and recognize ethical issues when they arise and to reason through them taking multiple perspectives and contexts into account.
4) Students will display the ability to access and analyze data, report facts accurately, research and edit information responsibly and in a manner commensurate with professional standards.
Readings:

Required readings will be made available online as Adobe PDF files on the course website each week (https://icon.uiowa.edu). Readings are expected to be completed before the start of the class period.

In addition to the required readings, students should browse through electronic resources in risk communication, in order to get familiarized with the “risk” context. RiskWorld.com is a useful database for news, events and publications related to risk in general. A compilation of electronic resources in risk communication is available at http://www.sra.org/resg/resgsources.html. Students will also be expected to follow daily news in order to bring to the discussion potential risk-related stories.

Assignments and grading:

(1) Take-home midterm exam (25% of grade):

The midterm questions will be given out on March 8th in class. The exam is due on March 22 in class. I will provide you with more information on the nature and length of the exam on a separate handout.

(2) Final (50%):

The research paper/project should be relevant to one of the themes covered in this class. It should draw from and reflect what we’ve studied of theory or research in the area of risk communication. You may examine media practices, communication content (i.e. a campaign or news coverage) or human behavior. At a minimum, you should indicate what evidence is relevant and how it might be gathered. Without trying to specify a formal research design, you should consider what your theory implies in terms of a program or agenda for research. Implications for improving existing theory and research should be included. Originality is an important criterion for evaluating your final paper. This does not mean, however, that you must start from scratch. A few of the studies we are going to read in class provide a good starting point. The final version of the seminar paper (hard copy) is due in my mailbox no later than May 7th at midnight.

(3) Participation (15%)

Please keep in mind that meaningful class participation implies (a) that you attend class on a regular basis and (b) that your contributions to discussion should be informed by the readings and other materials and not based merely on personal opinions. I will evaluate your participation accordingly.

In order to facilitate your involvement with the readings, each student will be asked to prepare a short presentation to summarize daily readings. Specifically, each student should volunteer to discuss one paper, section, or chapter briefly when it comes up in class. I will circulate a sign-up list during the first week of class. In your presentation you might (a) list the three main points, (b) indicate some things that weren't clearly written, (c) suggest some related phenomena, and (d) raise questions about the generality of the results or conclusions. Your part should take about 5-10 minutes (the ensuing discussion will certainly take longer). If you are having trouble, come see me. The idea is to get you involved actively with the material, to show me what you think, and to learn
to clearly present a research study on risk communication to a lay audience. Students not in charge with a specific reading for a class should attempt to bring examples (of current media coverage; campaigns, etc.) relevant to the topic under discussion.

(4) Risk communication evaluation (10%)

You will be asked to analyze a strategic message of your choice in terms of its effectiveness in a risk communication context. This exercise will involve a short writing assignment and a brief class presentation.

Grades will be based on the following percentage distribution:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94 and above</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90–93</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87–89</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83–86</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80–82</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>77–79</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>73–76</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70–72</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>67–69</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>D-</td>
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<td>59 and below</td>
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Course policies:

Absences/Lateness: Attendance at all classes is required. If you know in advance you will be missing a class, please speak with me to make appropriate arrangements. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to turn in the homework assignment, or paper, on time.

Tips for Harmonious Email Communication: You should feel free to email me with class questions or to set up meeting times. I try to respond to student emails in a timely manner (usually within 24 hours) but please try to avoid sending last-minute messages. If you have a question regarding any assignment, contact me at least 48 hours prior to their due date.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The following outline is subject to modification in line with class progress and speakers scheduling.

PART I: RISK PERCEPTIONS

Week 1  Case studies: a discussion on risk
01/18

Week 2  Defining risk
01/25

- K&G chapter 3

Additional readings:
Week 3
Understanding audiences’ perceptions of risk
02/01

- K&G chapter 10 & 11
- K&G chapter 5

Additional readings:

Week 4
The role of knowledge and trust in audience perceptions
02/08


Additional Readings:

PART II
MEDIA AND RISK

Week 5
How do media cover risk?
02/15


Additional Readings:

**Week 6 02/22**

*Explaining media coverage*


Additional Readings:

**Week 7 03/01**

*Media coverage, interpersonal discussions, and audience perceptions*

- K&G chapter 6

Additional Readings:
PART III  RISK AND SOCIETY

Week 8  03/08

- K&G chapter 4
- K&G chapters 7

Additional Readings:
- K&G chapter 8

SPRING BREAK*** NO CLASS WEEK OF MARCH 15th

Week 9  03/22

MIDTERM DUE ON MARCH 22nd


Additional Readings:
- K&G chapter 14

Week 10  03/29

Ethics and risk

Week 11
04/05

Public Engagement and Risk Communication


Week 12
04/12

Risk communication in the corporate world: case studies


PART IV: RISK COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

Week 13
04/19

Designing risk communication campaigns

Case Study: Analyzing a risk communication campaign

**FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE on the 21**


Week 14
04/26

Designing risk communication campaigns (continued)

- Campaign Presentations
Assessing the effectiveness of risk communication campaign

05/03

• Campaign Presentations

FINAL PAPERS: SUNDAY 05/07 by Midnight
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Policies and Procedures

Administrative Home
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall or see the CLAS Student Academic Handbook.

Electronic Communication
University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences. (Operations Manual, III.15.2. Scroll down to k.11.)

Academic Fraud
Plagiarism and any other activities when students present work that is not their own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is a serious matter and is reported to the departmental DEO and to the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum. Instructors and DEOs decide on appropriate consequences at the departmental level while the Associate Dean enforces additional consequences at the collegiate level. See the CLAS Student Academic Handbook.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint
Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit the instructor, then the course supervisor, and then the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident. See the CLAS Student Academic Handbook.

Accommodations for Disabilities
A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

Understanding Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment at www.uiowa.edu/~eod/policies/sexual-harassment-guide/index.html for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather
In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. (Operations Manual, Part IV, 16. See items e, h, and i.)

*The CLAS policy statements have been summarized from the web pages of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.