

COMS 5396 Risk Communication (Spring 2018)

Class Time & Classroom: Online**Instructor:** Dr. Cindy (Yixin) Chen

Email: cindychen@shsu.edu (email is the best way to reach me; please allow for **at least 24 hours** for a response to your email; you would expect to receive comments on your proposal/final paper and grade in **1 to 2 weeks** after it is submitted.)

Phone: (936) 294-3164**Office:** Dan Rather Com Building 324

Office Hours: Mon & Wed at 11am to 12pm or by email appointment (Although this is an online class, you are welcome to stop by or call my office during my office hours).

Course website: <https://shsu.blackboard.com/>

Textbooks

Required book: American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.)*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Recommended (not required) book: Cho, H., Reimer, R., & McComas, K. A. (2015). *The Sage handbook of risk communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Course Description

This graduate seminar introduces students to the extensive literature on risk communication, assists students in mastering some part of this literature and conducting research on risk issues and risk communication. Specifically, this course examines theory and research related to the communication of health, environmental, and technological risks. It provides you with a conceptual understanding of the fundamental issues that influence the relationships between risk communicators and the public. It looks at risk communication from multiple perspectives, including psychological, communication, and sociological. The course will emphasize understanding, applying, and developing theories of risk communication. It encourages you to think critically about risk communication as a dynamic process. After taking this course, you should be familiar with the major theories related to risk communication, have an appreciation for how these theories relate to the practice of risk communication, and be able to apply these theories in examining risk issues in our society.

To help students lay a good foundation for risk communication, the **1st unit** of the course provides an overview of risk communication and risk perception.

The **2nd unit** first discusses risk communication from the psychological perspective including two competing theoretical frameworks: risk as feelings and risk as analyses. Then we would move on to discuss risk communication from the communication perspective including intrapersonal perspective and mass communication perspective. The final section of this unit discusses risk communication from the sociological perspective involving the social amplification of risk.

The **3rd unit** discusses risk communication in applied contexts including risk communication and health/risky behaviors, developing risk messages, and several important constructs related to risk communication practice (i.e., trust & credibility; optimism & efficacy). The final part of this unit discusses risk communication and natural hazards, and implications for risk policy and decision making.

Course Objectives

- To gain an in-depth understanding of theories and research related to risk communication in three different perspectives (i.e., psychological, communication, and sociological).
- To gain an in-depth understanding of theories and research related to the role of risk communication in psychological, behavioral, health, and social outcomes.
- To share, effectively and appropriately, one's thinking and research about how risk communication deals with cognition, emotion, health behaviors, and other health/social outcomes.
- To develop an original research project related to this seminar's topic.

Required Readings

All readings will be posted on the SHSU Blackboard. One of the single most important things you can do as a graduate student of communication studies is to actually read these materials in a timely manner!

Class Meetings and Attendance

Although the class is on-line, attendance is still important for you to do well and to get the most out of the learning process. Students will be required to check in at least once a week for several purposes (see below).

Class Procedure

Students will check in each week in order to respond to discussion board material prompted by at least one student "presentation" outline from the readings. You will also have to respond to a response/comment posted by another student.

There might occasionally be mini-lectures by the instructor (**in written format**) that deal with especially important or complex topics, but the majority of class time will be taken up by presentations and discussions that are **prepared and led by individual students**.

Assignments

There are four kinds of assignments in this course.

1. Outline Presentations (Due Wednesday at 5pm, email it to me)

1.1. The outline presentations of readings (mentioned in the "Class Procedure" section) will be done **twice** by each student during the semester. They each deal with readings of the week covering a body of research on a particular aspect of risk communication.

1.2. The outlines need to be a minimum of two to three pages long, and should follow principles of good outlining, with clear organization, consistent use of levels of subdivision (main points, subpoints, sub-subpoints, etc.), clear language and explanations, and the like. Use roman numerals (I, II, III, IV,...) for first-level headings, capital letters (A, B, C, D,...) for second-level headings, numbers (1, 2, 3, 4,...) for third-level headings, and parenthetical numbers (1), (2), (3), (4),... for fourth-level headings, if needed.

Note: Feel free to skip anything related to statistics, if they don't make sense to you.

1.3. Prepare an original set of **5 questions** designed to promote class discussion about the readings on the discussion board, and include these at the end of your outline. Ideally, 2 to 3 questions are from one reading, and 2 to 3 questions are from the other reading.

1.4. Use a Word document to write your outline presentation; use Times New Roman, 12 point font, and single space.

1.5. The outlines of both readings and the 5 discussion questions should be in a **single** Word document. Before you email the document to me, please name it:

Week #_Presentation_First Name.

1.6. Please see an example of Outline Presentation (Week 2_Presentation_Cindy.docx) under "Unit I/week 2".

1.7. During a week when there are 2 presenters, each of them needs to **work independently** and do outlines for **both of the 2 readings**.

Presentation schedule:

We have 10 students in this class. The presentation schedule is arranged as follows. **The presenters need to email their presentations to me by Wed at 5pm.** I will comment on the presentations and upload them to Blackboard under the folder of each week. Students should expect to receive the commented presentations from me by email by **Thur at noon.** Upon receiving the commented presentations from me, the presenters need to read those comments and then post the 5 discussion questions on the weekly Discussion Board by **Thur midnight.** There are **no** presentations due for Week 1, Week 8, Week 9, Week 15, and Week 16.

Week	Date	Topic	Presenters	
week 1	1-15	Course Orientation and Introduction		
week 2	1-22	History of risk communication research	Andrea Elliott	
week 3	1/29	Risk perception, affect and emotion	Aaron Holland	Andrea Elliott
week 4	2/5	Risk as feelings (psychological perspective) Group formation due on 2/11 (Sunday) midnight (email group formation and topic to me)	Deshonia Irvin	Aaron Holland

week 5	2/12	Risk as analysis and risk as value (psychological perspective)	Connie Menn	Deshonia Irvin
week 6	2/19	Risk information seeking & processing (communication perspective)	Michelle Nash	Connie Menn
week 7	2/26	Risk communication and the media (communication perspective)	Caitlin Oringderff	Michelle Nash
week 8	3/5	No reading assignment: Proposal due on 3/11 (Sunday) midnight (20% of grade)		
week 9	3/12	Spring break--Enjoy!		
week 10	3/19	Social amplification of risk (sociological perspective)	Anabel Rodriguez	Caitlin Oringderff
week 11	3/26	Risk communication and health/risky behaviors	Myraji Romero	Anabel Rodriguez
week 12	4/2	Developing risk messages (intervention approaches in risk communication)	Katrina Watson	Myraji Romero
week 13	4/9	Trust and credibility in risk communication	Gina Marie Wilson	Katrina Watson
week 14	4/16	Optimism and efficacy in risk communication		Gina Marie Wilson
week 15	4/23	Risk communication and natural hazards (Optional)		
week 16	4/30	Implications for risk policy and risk management (Optional) Final Paper due on 5/6 (Sunday) midnight (40% of grade)		

2. Discussion Board Posting (Due Sunday midnight)

2.1. The **presenter(s)** should post the discussion questions on the weekly discussion board with each question as one thread **by Thur midnight**.

2.2. Each student must respond **two times**. Your first response should be directed to at least one of the questions posed by the student presenter. Your second response should be to a response posted by another student. In other words, you should directly engage at least one of the presenter's questions, and then engage in a dialogue based on how another student has responded to the presenter.

(The student presenter should not respond directly to his/her own questions. Instead, he/she should respond twice to other students' postings.)

2.3. Every response must be an absolute minimum of fifty words long.

2.4. Responses should be written carefully with attention paid to correct grammar and spelling.

2.5. Strive to make your responses thoughtful and thought-provoking, directly relevant to the issue at hand (not off-topic), and **(when possible) supported by material you have encountered in the readings.**

2.6. All responses should be ethical and civil, always displaying courtesy and open-mindedness toward others' viewpoints. This is a scholarly forum we will develop together and, as such, it is no place for personalizing responses, "flaming" others, etc.

3. Paper Proposal

For the paper proposal and final paper (to be developed based on your proposal), you are welcome to work on your own, but **I would strongly encourage you to work with 1 or 2 classmates.** We have 10 students in this class, so it would be great if we can form 4 research groups with 2-3 members in each group. As a master's student at UT-El Paso, I worked with 2 fellow students on a conference paper which won a top-paper award from NCA (National Communication Association).

I have created a forum on the Discussion Board focusing on "term paper topic discussion and finding research partners." In the next two weeks, please feel free to use that forum to brainstorm research topics and find 1 or 2 research partners. Please email me by **2/11 (Sunday) midnight** whether you have decided to work on your own or have formed a research group with other students, along with your paper topic. Please **elect a group coordinator** and have him/her email me names of your group members and a general paper topic. Please **copy your group members** in that email.

The paper proposal should be **3 to 5 pages** long (excluding references and title page). You need to briefly summarize an area of your interest related to "risk communication and any behavioral/health outcome," identify a significant unaddressed issue, and justify why it deserves empirical study. In your paper, you can examine risk communication from different perspectives (e.g., Psychological, Communication, and Sociological); your outcome variable (i.e., dependent variable) can be health status, health/risky behaviors (e.g., healthy eating, physical activity/exercise, drug/alcohol use, smoking, cancer screening); you can focus on a specific population (e.g., adolescents, cancer patients, older adults); you can study your topic in various contexts (e.g., information-seeking, patient-provider communication, social media).

Think about what the IVs (independent variables) are and what the DVs (dependent variables) are in your study. Your proposal needs to have at least one IV and at least one DV. Propose at least one research hypothesis or research question in your proposal. See this website (<http://psychology.about.com/od/hindex/g/hypothesis.htm>) regarding how to propose a hypothesis. Also see "**Paper proposal example**" under "Research Paper" for examples of research hypotheses and questions.

The proposal should follow the APA style, 6th edition. You can find a PPT document on APA style guide on Blackboard under the folder "Research Paper."

Please submit your proposal by 3/11 (Sunday) midnight through Blackboard.

4. Final Research Paper

Most significant to this course will be a final research paper that is about **10** pages long (excluding references and title page). You need to write an exhaustive literature review on a “risk communication and any behavioral/health outcome” topic, pose a set of hypotheses and/or research questions, and write a Method section. Papers must also be engagingly written, well organized, grammatically and mechanically correct, and follow the APA (6th edition) style.

Specifically, your final paper should accomplish two tasks:

4.1. Revise your proposal incorporating my comments/edits that you deem fit.

Remember, whatever your hypotheses are, you need to discuss in your paper why they are worth testing. This discussion may include: 1) the importance of the issue; 2) existing literature points to the direction of this hypothesis; 3) no study or few studies had tested this hypothesis.

4.2. Write a Method section which describes planned Study Procedure, Sample, and Measures of IVs and DVs. See “**Final Paper Example**” under “Research Paper” for example.

Please combine your Proposal and Method section into a single word document named “**First name/Group name_Final Paper.docx**.” Delete all track changes and all highlighted instruction sentences, double-check APA style, and proofread the paper before submission.

Please submit your final paper by **5/6 (Sunday) midnight** through Blackboard.

Grading:

1. Outline presentations: 14 points (7 points *2 times =14)
2. Discussion board posting: 22 points (2 points *11 weeks=22)
3. Group formation with paper topic: 2 points
4. Course evaluation: 2 points
5. Paper proposal: 20 points
6. Final research paper: 40 points

Total = 100 points

Grading scale: 90+ = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D; 59 & Below = F

Note: Late assignments/papers will receive half credit.

General Class Policies

A. Students are expected to assist in maintaining a course environment that is conducive to learning. All students and faculty are to be treated with courtesy and respect. I expect that an attitude that encourages freedom of discussion and intellectual inquiry will prevail. Therefore, behavior in this course that interferes with the potential for students to learn or my ability to adequately conduct the class is simply not acceptable. Students should read and adhere to all policies contained in the SHSU Student Handbook. Please see the link below for Student Guidelines:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/dean-of-students/documents/2016-2018%20Student%20Guidelines.pdf>

B. Be open and receptive to new ideas--you will be exposed to a lot of them this semester. Questioning your assumptions is the basis of learning.

C. If you encounter any personal/family emergency, **please inform me at the earliest opportunity**, and I will try my best to accommodate your needs. Assignment make-ups or late papers will be allowed with no penalty only if the student can present **written evidence of a legitimate reason** for having missed the due date. Absent a legitimate, documented reason, late assignments will either not be accepted or, at the discretion of the instructor, will be accepted with a penalty of **half credit**.

D. Plagiarism will result, at a minimum, in a zero for the assignment involved. Student work will be checked for plagiarism by any means available, including electronic plagiarism-detecting services. If students have ANY questions about what constitutes plagiarism, they should direct those questions to me, not other students.

E. If you have a documented disability that requires assistance, please contact the Chair of the Committee for Continuing Assistance for Disabled Students at 294-1720, provide me a copy of the documentation, and inform me of your special needs.

F. Your continued enrollment in this course indicates that you have accepted the conditions of this syllabus.

Notice: You will find online a more detailed description of these policies at <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

Recommendation Letters

I write recommendation letters for students who have excellent performance in class. If you would like to request a recommendation letter from me for application for a(n) award/scholarship, internship, Ph.D. program, or employment, you need to contact me at least **3 weeks before** the application deadline and provide the following information:

1. Post/link of the award/scholarship, internship, Ph.D. program, or employment;
2. A copy of your resume;
3. A copy of your cover letter (if the application requires).

Course Outline**Unit I: An overview of risk perception and risk communication**

Unit I objectives: Students will be able to explain the history of risk communication research, define risk communication and risk perception, and distinguish/describe affect and emotion.

week 1 1/15 Course orientation and introduction

Read this syllabus, acquaint yourself with the online environment, and post a self-introduction on the discussion board.

week 2 1/22 History of risk communication research

Fischhoff, B. (1995). Risk perception and communication unplugged: Twenty years of process. *Risk Analysis*, 2, 137-144.

McComas, K. A. (2006). Defining moments in risk communication research: 1996-2005. *Journal of Health Communication*, 11, 75-91.

week 3 1/29 Risk perception, affect and emotion

Bodemer, N., & Gaissmaier, W. (2015). Risk perception. In H. Cho, T. Reimer, & K. A. McComas (Eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. 10–23). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peters, E. (2011). Affect and emotion. In B. Fischhoff, N. Brewer and J. Downs (Eds.). *Communicating risks and benefits: an evidence-based user's guide* (pp 89-100). Silver Spring, MD: Food and Drug Administration.

Unit II: Risk communication research: Three disciplinary perspectives

Unit II objectives: Students will be able to compare and contrast the conceptualization and theorization of risk and risk communication from three disciplinary perspectives.

week 4 2/5 Risk as feelings (psychological perspective)**Group formation due on 2/11 (Sunday) midnight**

Loewenstein, G. F., Weber, E. U., Hsee, C. K., & Welch, N. (2001). Risk as feelings. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 267–286

Kobbeltved, T., Brun, W., Johnsen, B. H., & Eid, J. (2005). Risk as feelings or risk and feelings? A cross-lagged panel analysis. *Journal of Risk Research*, 8(5), 417–437.

week 5 2/12 Risk as analysis and risk as value (psychological perspective)

Slovic, P., Finucane, M. L., Peters, E., & MacGregor, D. (2004). Risk as analysis and risk as feelings: Some thoughts about affect, reason, risk and rationality. *Risk Analysis*, 24, 311–322.

Finucane, M. L., & Holup, J. L. (2006). Risk as value: Combining affect and analysis in risk judgments. *Journal of Risk Research*, 9(2), 141-164. doi: 10.1080/13669870500166930

week 6 2/19 Risk information seeking and processing (communication perspective)

Yang, Z. J., McComas, K. A., Gay, G., Leonard, J. P., Dannenberg, A. J., & Dillon, H. (2011). Information seeking related to clinical trial risk enrollment. *Communication Research*, 38, 856-882.

Trumbo, C. W. (2002). Information processing and risk perception: An adaptation of the heuristic-systematic model. *Journal of Communication*, 52, 367-382.

week 7 2/26 Risk communication and the media (communication perspective)

Tyler, T. R. & Cook, F. L. (1984). The mass media and judgments of risk: Distinguishing impact on personal and societal level judgments. *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology*, 47, 693-708.

Friedman, S. M., & Egolf, B. P. (2011). A longitudinal study of newspaper and wire service coverage of nanotechnology risks. *Risk Analysis*, 31(11), 1701-1717. doi:10.1111/j.1539-6924.2011.01690.x

week 8 3/5 No reading assignment

Paper proposal due on 3/11 (Sunday) midnight (20% of grade)

week 9 3/12 Spring break--Enjoy!**week 10 3/19 Social amplification of risk (sociological perspective)**

Kasperson, R. E., Renn, O., Slovic, P., Brown, H. S., Emel, J., Goble, R., et al. (1988). The social amplification of risk: A conceptual framework. *Risk Analysis*, 8, 177-187.

Frewer, L. J., Miles, S., & Marsh, R. (2002). The media and genetically modified foods: Evidence in support of social amplification of risk. *Risk Analysis*, 22, 701-711.

Unit III: Risk communication in applied contexts

Unit III objectives: Students will be able to relate research findings on risk communication to risk issues in their personal life and current society, develop a research paper that summarizes an area on this topic, identifies a significant unaddressed issue, and proposes research questions/hypotheses.

week 11 3/26 Risk communication and health/risky behaviors

Cousins, S. O. (2000). "My heart couldn't take it": Older women's beliefs about exercise benefits and risks. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 55(5), 283-294. doi: 10.1093/geronb/55.5.P283

Chen, Y., & Yang, Q. (2017). How do cancer risk perception, benefit perception of quitting, and cancer worry influence quitting intention among current smokers: A study using the 2013 HINTS. *Journal of Substance Use*, 22(5), 555-560. doi: 10.1080/14659891.2016.1271033

week 12 4/2 Developing risk messages (intervention approaches in risk communication)

Fischhoff, B. (1999). Why (cancer) risk communication can be hard. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute Monographs*, 25, 7-13.

Chen, Y., & Yang, Z. J. (2015). Message formats, numeracy, risk perceptions of alcohol-attributable cancer, and intentions for binge drinking among college students. *Journal of Drug Education*, 45(1), 37-55. doi: 10.1177/0047237915604062

week 13 4/9 Trust and credibility in risk communication

Slovic, P. (1993). Perceived risk, trust, and democracy. *Risk Analysis*, 13, 675-682.

Trumbo, C. W., & McComas, K. A. (2003). The function of credibility in information processing for risk perception. *Risk Analysis*, 23, 343-353.

week 14 4/16 Optimism and efficacy in risk communication

Weinstein, N. (1989). Optimistic biases about personal risks. *Science*, 246, 1232-1233.

Yang, Z. J. (2012). Too scared or too capable? Why do college students stay away from the H1N1 flu vaccine? *Risk Analysis*, 32(1), 1703-1716.

week 15 4/23 Risk communication and natural hazards (Optional)

Martin, I. M., Bender, H. and Raish, C. (2007). What motivates individuals to protect themselves from risks: The case of wildland fires. *Risk Analysis*, 27, 887–900. doi:10.1111/j.1539-6924.2007.00930.x

Lazo, J. K., Bostrom, A., Morss, R. E., Demuth, J. L. and Lazrus, H. (2015). Factors affecting hurricane evacuation intentions. *Risk Analysis*, 35, 1837–1857. doi:10.1111/risa.12407

week 16 4/30 Implications for risk policy and risk management (Optional)**Final Paper due on 5/6 (Sunday) midnight (40% of grade)**

Arvai, J. L. (2003). Using risk communication to disclose the outcome of a participatory decision-making process: Effects on the perceived acceptability of risk-policy decisions. *Risk Analysis*, 23, 281-289.

Hallegatte, S., & J. Rentschler (2015), Risk management for development - Assessing obstacles and prioritizing action. *Risk Analysis*, 35(2), 193–210