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when door is open,
when "I'm here" sign is up,
and by appointment

VIBS 664.600
RISK AND CRISIS REPORTING
Fall 2011
Fridays 9 to 11:45 a.m., 208 VRB

This course is intended mainly to increase your knowledge and skill regarding the reporting of environmental, health, and other risks. More specifically, goals of the course include increasing

- your familiarity with concepts and issues related to risk and crisis reporting
- your skill at reporting on risks and at facilitating risk reporting by others
- your ability to manage crisis communication
- your knowledge of environmental, health, and other risks
- your motivation to keep learning about risk and crisis reporting and your ability to do so

Like other courses primarily for science and technology journalism master's students, this course is also intended to help you keep refining your writing, editing, and speaking skills. Because it is a reporting course, it is relatively writing intensive.

The goals of the course will be pursued largely through classroom activities, readings, and writing assignments. The course will have a seminar format; classroom activities will include discussions of readings, presentations by class members, guest sessions, and workshops on class members' writing. Because much of your learning will depend on your participation, you will be expected to attend class regularly; only in exceptional circumstances should more than two sessions be missed.

The main books for this course are

- *Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks*, 4th edition, by Regina E. Lundgren and Andrea H. McMakin (John Wiley & Sons, 2009)
- *Communicating Risks and Benefits: An Evidence-Based User's Guide*, edited by Baruch Fischhoff, Noel T. Brewer, and Julie S. Downs (Food and Drug Administration, US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011) (available at www.fda.gov/downloads/AboutFDA/ReportsManualsForms/Reports/UCM268069.pdf)

Some other readings also will be assigned. In addition, class members will present highlights of chapters in *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, edited by W. Timothy Coombs and Sherry J. Holladay (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); a copy of this book will be available to borrow. Core reading assignments are noted on the schedule below, and additional readings will be announced in class.

The graded items and the percentages of your grade that they will constitute are as follows:

brief writing assignments (6 assignments, each counting 5% of grade)	30%
examination questions and answer key	15%
oral presentation on chapters in Coombs and Holladay	10%
oral presentation based on final project	10%
written version of final project	25%
journal	10%

The writing assignments are noted on the schedule below, and further guidance will be provided in class. All writing assignments should be word-processed and double-spaced, with an unjustified right margin; pages should be numbered. Unless otherwise requested, please submit hard copies.

Grading of assignments will be as follows: A+:98, A:95, A-:92, B+:88, B:85, B-:82, etc. To receive a grade in the A range, work must be of professional quality.

The success of a course such as this one depends on contributions from the students as well as from the teacher. Suggestions for making the course more educational and more enjoyable are appreciated at any time.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

<u>Session/Date</u>	<u>Main Activities and Assignments</u>
1 Sep 2	Introduction to the Course Highlights of Some Chapters on Basics of Risk and Crisis Communication
2 Sep 9	Discussion: Reading for Today Workshop: Writing for Today Introduction to Media Training Workshop to Be Held Monday Core Reading Due: <i>Risk Communication</i> chapters 1-5 Writing Due: highlights of reading for this week In the reading due today, identify five points that you think will aid you in your further studies or your work. Present each point in your own words, and say how you can envision applying it. If desired, also relate the point to other knowledge. This assignment should run about 500 words. It may be in any format. Please bring copies for everyone to class. Journal Entries (due each week): Throughout the course, please keep a journal on instances you observe of risk or crisis communication in the popular media or elsewhere. The journal should include at least two entries, for a total of at least 100 words, per week. Each entry should clearly identify and describe the observed communication and should include your evaluation of it. Where feasible, relate observations to material in class. Please bring your journal to class each week, and be ready to present the main content from at least one entry from the week. Also, at least three times during the course, the journals will be collected and graded. The writing in the journal need not be polished. However, it should be observant, clear, and thoughtful.
3 Sep 12 (Monday) (8-noon)	Special Session: Steps for Managing an Immediate Media Crisis Speaker: Jim Humphries, DVM, Veterinary News Network Note: This event is a media training workshop being held by the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. It will take the place of the class on October 21.
4	Discussion: Workshop from Monday

- Sep 16 Workshop: Writing for Today
 Discussion: Reading for Today
Core Reading Due: *Risk Communication* chapters 6-9
Writing Due: brief assignment related to Monday's workshop
 Please do *one* of the following: (1) Prepare an approximately 500-word news story about the workshop Monday by Dr. Humphries. The story may be targeted for *The Battalion*, *CVM Today*, or another venue of your choice. Please specify the venue. (2) Prepare an approximately 500-word memo about the workshop by Dr. Humphries. The intended audience should be people in your graduate program who did not attend. In your memo, present the points from the workshop that you think readers would find most helpful. If you disagreed with any major advice in the workshop, you may say so; if you do, say why you disagree.
- 5
 Sep 23 Discussion/Workshop: Reading and Writing for Today
 Viewing and Discussion: Interviews with Blake Morrison and Brad Heath, Winners of the 2009 Grantham Prize
Core Reading Due: *Risk Communication* chapters 10-13
Reading or Browsing Due: "The Smokestack Effect: Toxic Air and America's Schools," from *USA Today*
 (content.usatoday.com/news/nation/environment/smokestack/index)
Writing Due: brief assignment related to the reading
 Please do *one* of the following. Whichever option you choose, the assignment should run about 500 words. (1) In chapters 6-13, identify five to ten points that you think will aid you in your further studies or your work. Present each point in your own words, and say how you can envision applying it. If desired, also relate the point to other knowledge. This assignment may be in any format. (2) Look carefully at "The Smokestack Effect." Note major strengths of the reporting. If desired, also note limitations.
- 6
 Sep 30 Discussion: Reading for Today
 Student Presentation on Part I of Coombs and Holladay
Core Reading Due: *Risk Communication* chapters 14-16
Writing Due: none—it's time for a break
- 7
 Oct 7 Discussion/Workshop: Reading and Writing for Today
 Student Presentation on Another Part of Coombs and Holladay
 Introduction: Writing Assignment Due October 28
Core Reading Due: *Risk Communication* chapters 17-18
Writing Due: brief assignment related to the reading
 Please do *one* of the following. Whichever option you choose, the assignment should run about 500 words. (1) In chapters 14-18, identify five to ten points that you think will aid you in your further studies or your work. Present each point in your own words, and say how you can envision applying it. If desired, also relate the point to other knowledge. This assignment may be in any format. (2) Describe and evaluate some

online risk-related materials presented in one of the sources listed in Table 18-2.

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Oct 14

Discussion/Workshop: Reading and Writing for Today
Student Presentation on Another Part of Coombs and Holladay
Introduction: Final Project

Core Reading Due: *Risk Communication* chapters 19-21

Browsing Due: Examples of Case Studies in Risk and Crisis Communication

Writing Due: brief assignment related to the reading

Please do *one* of the following. Whichever option you choose, the assignment should run about 500 words. (1) In chapters 19-21, identify five to ten points that you think will aid you in your further studies or your work. Present each point in your own words, and say how you can envision applying it. If desired, also relate the point to other knowledge. This assignment may be in any format. (2) Using guidance provided in the book *Risk Communication*, prepare a brief piece presenting risk information to a general audience. The piece may be a newspaper or magazine story, a fact sheet, or another type of communication.

(As noted, class will not meet on October 21. The workshop on September 12 replaced the October 21 session.)

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Oct 28

Workshop: Writing for Today
Discussion: Reading for Today
Student Presentation on Another Part of Coombs and Holladay
Introduction: Final Project

Reading Due:

- excerpts from *The Reporter's Environmental Handbook*, 3rd edition, by Bernadette M. West et al (Rutgers University Press, 2003)
- excerpts from *Covering the Environment: How Journalists Work the Green Beat*, by Bob Wyss (Routledge, 2008)

**Writing Due: questions and answer key for an examination
based on *Risk Communication***

Prepare five multiple-choice questions and two essay questions for an examination based on the book *Risk Communication*.

- In total, the multiple-choice questions should draw on material from at least five chapters. Each question should have four or five options. An answer key should be provided. For each question, the key should include a paragraph identifying the correct option (and saying why it is correct, if not obvious) and explaining why the other options are incorrect.
- In total, the essay questions should draw on material from at least two chapters. Answering the questions should require use of higher mental skills; for example, they should require people to apply, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate (not, for example, just list or define). The questions can be open book; please say whether they should be so. Each question should be accompanied by one

to three paragraphs of commentary noting major points that a good answer should include and, if desired, providing other remarks (such as an explanation of why the question was chosen).

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Nov 4 Discussion: Reading for Today
Progress Reports: Final Project
Discussion (in person or remotely) with a Journalist or Public Information Officer
Experienced in Risk or Crisis Communication or an Academic Expert
on the Topic
Reading Due: *Communicating Risks and Benefits* chapters 1-13
- 11
Nov 11 Discussion: Reading for Today
Progress Reports: Final Project
Discussion (in person or remotely) with a Journalist or Public Information Officer
Experienced in Risk or Crisis Communication or an Academic Expert
on the Topic
Reading Due: *Communicating Risks and Benefits* chapter 14-22
- 12
Nov 18 Workshop: Writing Due Today
Discussion: Reading for Today
Progress Reports: Final Project
Discussion (in person or remotely) with a Journalist or Public Information Officer
Experienced in Risk or Crisis Communication or an Academic Expert
on the Topic
Reading Due: some feature articles on risks or crises
Writing Due: a book review of *Communicating Risks and Benefits*
Please write a review, of publishable quality, of the book *Communicating Risks and Benefits*. The review, which should run about 500 words, should both describe and evaluate the book. The review may be for any newspaper, magazine, journal, or other venue that publishes book reviews. Please state the intended venue.
- 13
Dec 2 Discussion (in person or remotely) with a Journalist or Public Information Officer
Experienced in Risk and Crisis Communication or an Academic Expert
on the Topic
Discussion: Reading for Today
Progress Reports: Final Project
Reading Due: some additional articles on risk or crisis communication
- 14
Dec 5
(Mon:
redefined
day) Student Presentations: Final Project
Wrap-Up
Writing Due: case study, feature article or alternative assignment
Please do one of the following. Whichever option you choose, the written version of your project should run 2000 to 3000 words. Of course, in preparing the project you should draw on what you have learned in the course.
- Prepare a case study describing, analyzing, and evaluating either (1) how a risk has been communicated or (2) how communication has been done in

a crisis. In preparing the case study, draw on information sources of a variety of types. Among possibilities are stories in the popular media; materials from institutional sources; and interviews with journalists, public information officers, and others.

- Write a feature article about a risk or crisis. Be sure to specify the target publication. In preparing the feature article, draw on information sources of a variety of types. Among possibilities are journal articles; government documents; and interviews with researchers, policymakers, and others.
- Prepare a paper of another type on an aspect of risk communication or an aspect of crisis communication. If you wish to take this option, please discuss your plans with the instructor, to ensure that your paper will satisfactorily fulfill the assignment.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, in Cain Hall, Room B118, or call 845-1637. For additional information, visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Academic Integrity

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.” For more information, please see <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>.