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Appointments in person, by Zoom, and by phone are readily available. Also feel free to drop by if I am in the office and not meeting with someone else.

VIBS 664.600  
**Risk and Crisis Reporting**  
Spring 2023  
Thursdays, 8:45-11:30 a.m.  
VIDI 121

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

- your familiarity with concepts and issues related to risk and crisis reporting
- your skill in reporting on risks and 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

Like other courses given through the science journalism graduate program, this course also is 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 are pursued largely through classroom activities, readings, and writing assignments. The classroom activities include short presentations by the instructor, discussions of readings, short presentations by class members, guest segments, and workshops on class members' writing. Because much of your learning will depend on your participation, you are expected to attend class regularly; normally no more than two class sessions should be missed. However, if you are ill, please stay home; I will be glad to have you join us remotely if your condition permits.

The textbook for this course is *Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks*, 6th edition, by Regina E. Lundgren and Andrea H. McMakin (IEEE Press and Wiley, 2018). This book can be accessed electronically through the Texas A&M University library, and copies are available from booksellers. Other readings, such as articles and book chapters, also will be assigned. Some of these readings are listed on the course schedule, and others will be announced in class.

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

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Equivalent in Points</u>
discussion posts*	10%	200
brief writing assignments (6 assignments, 5% each)**	30%	600
examination questions and answer key	10%	200
oral presentation on a set of chapters or articles	10%	200
oral presentation based on final project	10%	200
written version of final project	25%	500
feedback on classmates' writing***	5%	100
	<b>100%</b>	<b>2000</b>

\*Discussion posts normally will be due at noon Tuesday.

\*\*Writing assignments normally will be due at 8 a.m. Wednesday.

\*\*\*Feedback on classmates' assignments normally will be due at 11:59 p.m. Wednesday.  
(Earlier submission of items is encouraged.)

The writing assignments are noted on the schedule below, and further guidance will be provided in class. Unless otherwise noted, writing assignments should be submitted via Canvas. They should be in Word, and they should be double-spaced, with an unjustified right margin; pages should be numbered.

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 essentially professional quality.

Students should meet individually with the instructor for conferences on their work. One conference should be during the first half of the course, and the other should be during the second half. Additional conferences are readily available on request.

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 enjoyable are appreciated at any time.

### Course Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, the student will be able to do the following:

- Identify basic aspects of risk perception and their implications for risk communication
- Know and apply principles of communicating with general audiences about risks
- Know and apply principles of communicating with general audiences about crises
- Show familiarity with some major risks and crises relating to science, health, or the environment
- Identify resources for learning further about science-related risks and crises and their communication

### Late Work Policy

Except in cases of excused absences, 10% of the maximum available points for an assignment will be deducted for each 24 hours or portion thereof that an assignment is late.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

<u>Session/Date</u>	<u>Main Activities and Assignments</u>
1 Jan 19	Introductions: The Participants and the Course Highlights: Some Chapters on Basics of Risk and Crisis Communication
2 Jan 26	Discussion: Reading for Today Workshop: Writing for Today <b>Core Reading Due:</b> “Introduction” and “Understanding Risk Communication” ( <i>Risk Communication</i> chapters 1-6) <b>Writing Due (brief assignment #1)—to be uploaded by 8 a.m. Wed, Jan 25</b> Please identify a risk-communication situation in which you were involved, either as a recipient of risk information or as a provider. Briefly describe this situation and the risk communication therein. Drawing at least partly on the reading for today, identify strengths, weaknesses, or both of the risk communication in this situation. This assignment should run about 500 words

(two double-spaced pages).

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Feb 2

Discussion: Reading for Today

Workshop: Writing for Today

**Core Reading Due:** “Planning the Risk Communication Effort” (*Risk Communication* chapters 7-12)

**Writing Due (brief assignment #2)—to be uploaded by 8 a.m. Wed, Feb 1**

In the [program](#) for the 2023 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) annual meeting, identify at least 10 sessions that relate to risk or crisis or the communication thereof. If not obvious from the title, explain why you perceive that the session relates to a risk or crisis or its communication. Of these sessions, identify at least 3 that you would want to attend; for each, say why you would like to attend it and what you would hope to gain. This assignment should run about 500 words.

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Feb 9

Discussion: Reading for Today

Workshop: Writing for Today

Introduction: Student-Presentation Assignment

Introduction: Final Project

Pointers: Giving Presentations

**Core Reading/Viewing/Listening Due:**

- “Putting Risk Communication into Action,” Part 1 (*Risk Communication* chapters 13-16)
- [2022 AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Award winners named | AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards](#)
- Selected items winning 2022 AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards (to be presented in a virtual ceremony in conjunction with the 2023 AAAS annual meeting)

**Writing Due (brief assignment #3)—to be uploaded by 8 a.m. Wed, Feb 8**

Read, view, or listen to the assigned award-winning items. Then, for any 3 of them, identify strengths of the content and crafting. Focus especially on aspects relating to risk and crisis communication. The assignment should run about 500 words.

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Feb 16

Discussion: Reading for Today

In-Class Reading (or Listening or Viewing) and Discussion: Some Risk-Related Environmental Journalism

**Core Reading Due:**

- “Putting Risk Communication into Action,” Part 2 (*Risk Communication* chapters 17-20)
- 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*, 2nd edition, by Bob Wyss (Routledge, 2019)
- “Disaster Journalism: Fostering Citizen and Community Disaster Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, Recovery, and Resilience Across the Disaster Cycle” by J. Brian Houston et al, *Disasters*, 2019, 43(3), 591-6

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Feb 23
- Workshop: Writing Assignment for Today  
Discussion: Reading for Today  
Workshop: Writing Assignment for Today  
Discussion: Reading for Last Week and Today  
**Core Reading Due:**
- “Evaluation of Risk Communication Efforts” (*Risk Communication* chapter 21)
- Writing Due (brief assignment #4)—to be uploaded by 8 a.m. Wed, Feb 22**  
Identify an item intended to present risk-related information to a general audience. Some possibilities are articles, fact sheets, patient-information handouts, brochures, infographics, videos, podcasts, webpages, and social media posts. Describe the item and note its strengths and its weaknesses, if any, especially in light of guidelines from the textbook. Attach a copy of the item or provide a link to it.
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Mar 2
- Because of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) annual meeting, class will not meet today. If you are attending the AAAS meeting (either virtually or in person), please attend at least 1 session regarding a risk or crisis or regarding risk or crisis communication, and be ready to report on the session(s) in class next week. If you are not attending the AAAS meeting, you will be assigned a choice of items to read, view, or listen to and then report on next week.
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Mar 9
- Discussion: Reading Due Today  
Introduction: Writing Assignment Due March 29  
Progress Reports: Presentations  
Workshop: Writing Assignment Due Today  
*Guest Segment:* Naveena Sadasivam, MA, Senior Staff Writer, *Grist*  
**Core Reading Due:**
- “Special Cases in Risk Communication” (*Risk Communication* chapters 22-24 and back matter)
  - Selected writing by Naveena Sadasivam
- Writing Due (brief assignment #5)—to be uploaded by 8 a.m. Wed, Mar 8**  
If you attended the AAAS annual meeting: Write a news story about a AAAS meeting session you attended on a risk or crisis or its communication. The story, which should run about 500 words, should be largely in inverted pyramid format and should include quotes. Please specify the publication or other venue for which it is intended. If you did not attend the AAAS annual meeting: Please write a review of the item read, viewed, or listened to last week. Further instructions will be provided in class.
- \* Spring Break \* Spring Break \* Spring Break \* Spring Break \* Spring Break \* Spring Break \*
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Mar 23
- Student Presentations on Sets of Chapters or Articles (Set 1 of 2)  
Discussion: Reading for the Day  
*Guest Segment:* Michelle Annette Meyer, PhD, Director, Hazard Reduction & Recovery Center, and Associate Professor, Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, Texas A&M University

**Core Reading Due:** Some Case Studies**Instructions for Presentations on Sets of Chapters or Articles**

In consultation with the instructor, identify about 3 to 5 chapters and/or articles on an aspect of risk communication or crisis communication that interests you. Then prepare an approximately 20-minute presentation that shares with your classmates the highlights of the readings. For classmates' future consultation, please provide slides or a handout.

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Mar 30

Student Presentations on Sets of Chapters or Articles (Part 2 of 2)

Workshop: Writing for Today

**Writing Due: questions and answer key for an examination based on*****Risk Communication*—to be uploaded by 8 a.m. Wed, Mar 29**

Prepare 5 multiple-choice questions and 2 essay questions for an examination based on the book *Risk Communication*.

- In total, the multiple-choice questions should draw on material from at least 5 chapters. Each question should have 4 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 2 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. Accompany each question with 1 to 3 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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Apr 6

Discussion: Reading for Today

Progress Reports: Final Project

*Guest Segment:* Monica Martinez, MPA, Director, Crisis Communications, Texas A&M University

**Core Reading Due:**

- “Communicating Statistics and Risk” by Andrew Pleasant, in SciDev.Net, 2008 (<https://www.scidev.net/global/health/practical-guide/communicating-statistics-and-risk.html>)
- “How to Report on a Disease Outbreak or Pandemic” by Fang Xuanchang, Jia Hepeng, and Katherine Nightingale, in SciDev.Net, 2009 (<https://www.scidev.net/global/disease/practical-guide/how-to-report-a-disease-outbreak-or-pandemic-1.html>)
- “What Are the Odds? Reporting on Risk” by Jane C. Hu, in The Open Notebook, 2016 (<https://www.theopennotebook.com/2016/11/01/what-are-the-odds-reporting-on-risk/>)
- “Here Be Dragons” by Andrew J. Hamilton, Robert M. May, and Edward K. Waters, *Nature*, 2015, 520, 42-43 (<https://www.nature.com/articles/520042a>)

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Apr 13

Presentations on Final Project  
Progress Reports: Final Project  
Workshop: Writing Due Today  
**Core Reading Due:** to be announced

**Writing Due (brief assignment #6)—to be uploaded by 8 a.m. Wed, Apr 12**

Please do *one* of the following. Whichever option you choose, the assignment should run about 500 words. (1) Using guidance provided in the textbook and other reading, write a piece presenting risk information to a general audience. The piece may be a newspaper or magazine story, a blog post, a fact sheet, or another type of communication. (2) Identify a newspaper story, magazine story, blog post, or other piece about a risk. Using material in this course, identify its strengths and limitations. Include a copy of or link to the item you evaluated.

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Apr 20

Presentations on Final Project  
Progress Reports: Final Project  
*Guest Segment:* Andrew Dessler, PhD, Professor of Atmospheric Sciences, Texas A&M University; 2021 recipient, American Geophysical Union Climate Communication Prize

**Core Reading Due:** some items by and/or about the guest speaker

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April 27

Wrap-Up

**Writing Due: case study, feature article, or other assignment**

Please do one of the following. Whichever option you choose, your project should run 2000 to 3000 words (about 8 to 12 double-spaced pages). 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. For the case study, draw on various types of information sources. 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 article, draw on information sources of various types. Among possibilities are journal articles; government documents; and interviews with researchers, policymakers, and others.
- Write a review of a book, or of a pair of books, about a risk or crisis. The book(s) should be approved by the professor as suitable for the course. About half of the review should be devoted to summarizing the book(s). Most of the rest should be spent evaluating the book(s), especially in relation to the course material on reporting on risks and crises.
- Write a paper describing and evaluating the risk and crisis communication that an organization has done regarding COVID-19 or another recent crisis. The organization may be, for instance, an association, a government agency, or an educational institution. Of course, provide or note examples. If possible, include not only your own assessment but also views of others.
- Write a paper describing and evaluating an aspect of risk and crisis

communication regarding the COVID-19 situation. Some of the many possibilities are communication with specific demographic groups regarding COVID-19, use of social media in communicating about COVID-19, and visual communication regarding COVID-19. Of course, provide or note examples. If possible, include not only your own assessment but also views of others.

- Prepare a paper of another type on an aspect of risk or crisis communication. If you wish to take this option, please discuss your plans with the instructor to ensure that your paper will fulfill the assignment.

## Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

## Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](#).)

## Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

"Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case" ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at [aggiehonor.tamu.edu](http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu).

## Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below). Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

*Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit [disability.tamu.edu](http://disability.tamu.edu).*

## Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, a person who is subjected to the alleged conduct will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University's goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

*Students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#).*

## Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care by utilizing available resources and services on your campus.



*Students who need someone to talk to can contact Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) or call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).*

### **University-Approved Statement Regarding COVID-19 Prevention**

*To help protect Aggieland and stop the spread of COVID-19, Texas A&M University urges students to be vaccinated and to wear masks in classrooms and all other academic facilities on campus, including labs. Doing so exemplifies the Aggie Core Values of respect, leadership, integrity, and selfless service by putting community concerns above individual preferences. COVID-19 vaccines and masking — regardless of vaccination status — have been shown to be safe and effective at reducing spread to others, infection, hospitalization, and death.*