

Background

It's an early Friday afternoon in August, and you're sitting in your Politics of Plague class. The professor is reviewing the readings on zombie apocalypse. How funny! Like anyone really believes in zombies. Pfffft... But as she turns to the blackboard, something strange happens: everyone's cell phones emit a strident and loud beep. Professor Stapleton has already told you to NOT use your cell phone in class. However, it's such a strange phenomenon that the Professor takes her own phone out. So, you steal a quick look at your phone. This is what you see:



Well, that seems weird, but you're not worried; it's the beginning of the term, and there's no way you'd be traveling off campus anyway. Already too much homework... But when you look up, you see that Professor Stapleton looks pale and *very worried*. What the heck is going on? She tells everyone that you're going to take a break for a minute while she checks the news. Perfect timing, you need a snack and head to the vending machine.

As you walk through the hallways, you notice that students and professors in other classrooms are huddled over their computers or looking at their phones. You're starting to think that maybe this alert means something worse than you thought. You skip the snack and hurry back to your class. When you walk in the door, the anxiety in the room is palpable. Now your *classmates* look pale and very worried. Did you just hear someone say "zombies"? What the HECK is going on???

Situation

Initial reports indicate that a new and strange infectious disease has appeared in a few cities around the United States: New York, Raleigh, Miami, and Los Angeles. While seemingly contained to these cities, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is concerned enough that they have used the national emergency alert system. News reporters are talking seriously about the epidemic having the potential to develop into a zombie apocalypse. You think, this is crazy – everyone knows the chapters you have to read from *World War Z* for class are fiction, right? Apparently not. All the phones beep again:



Professor Stapleton tells the class we have a choice: we can go home early and hunker down, or we can spend the rest of class time trying to figure out if there are better options. *The class unanimously votes to get to work.*

Phase 1: Preliminary Research (10 minutes)

Students will separate into teams to do research in order to figure out the best course of action. Work in groups for 10 minutes to determine what pieces of information are crucial to coming up with an action plan. **Please note: You are not yet creating an action plan!** You are brainstorming with your group to come up with a research strategy. What *will* you need to know?

Phase 2: Action Plan Development (30 minutes)

Breaking news reports will provide you with additional information. Some of it may be direct, useful information. Some of it may indirectly guide you to important information. Consider *all* information that is provided to you during Phase 2. At the end of Phase 2, your team must present an action plan. **What will your team do once class is over?**

Instructor Guidelines

Timeline:

- Let students introduce themselves in groups and get started. At 10 minute mark, before starting Phase 2, show them the 1st breaking news alert from PPT.
- Let students work for 10 minutes, then interrupt them with 2nd breaking news alert.
- Let them work for another 10 minutes, then show them the 3rd breaking news alert.
- Let them work for a final 10 minutes before bringing them together to present & debrief.

External pieces of information:

- Type of infection: how it spreads, who it affects, symptoms; mutated flu virus: Z5N1; $R_0 = 18-22$
- US cities affected: starts with NYC, Raleigh, Miami, and Los Angeles. Spreads to Seattle, San Francisco, and Boston.
- North American cities affected: Toronto, Montreal, Mexico City, and Cancun.
- Borders closed: with other North American countries. Planes returned. Rest of world is shutting Americans out.
- Shelter in place; wait for any evacuation notifications; do not approach anyone exhibiting symptoms.

Things to remember:

- *Community*. We are not alone (are students considering their friends, family, WPI community?).
- *Costs*. Do they have the money to implement particular policy? To implement individual action plan?
- *Trust*. Do they trust policymakers to make the right choices for them? At what level – WPI? Worcester? MA? CDC? US?
- *Transport*. How are you getting where you want to go?

Circulate in the room as students work, asking groups questions about the decisions they are making.

Debrief questions:

- [Follow up on “Things to remember” points]
- Who did they include in their plans? Were they going to attempt to communicate risk to anyone else? How?
- How did the breaking news alert (additional information) influence the way they responded?
- Do you feel safe when other entities are assessing and managing risk for you? [goes back to level of trust in policymakers and experts]