

Worcester Polytechnic Institute – Social Science & Policy Studies Dept.
ENV 280X: Environmental & Risk Communication Sample Syllabus
Dr. Patricia Stapleton

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to introduce theories and practices of environmental and risk communication; develop an ability to describe, analyze, and evaluate environmental and risk communication activities; and to increase understanding of how government agencies, scientists, corporations, and others attempt to persuade the public about environmental and risk issues. Students will become critically engaged citizens and develop skills that will support future careers that put them in the position of being the sources and recipients of environmental and risk communication efforts. Topics covered in the course include the reason so much emphasis is placed on communication strategies, in contrast to regulations or technical design, to promote environmental and healthy behaviors and reduce environmental and health risks. Using a variety of examples, students will also learn how information about risks and the environment is processed, framed, and evaluated and how communication influences attitudes and behaviors about risks and the environment. Finally, the class will explore what are best practices for the design of communication programs to inform and persuade about environmental and health risks.

Assessment Statement & Learning Objectives

Your understanding of the course material will be evaluated through your participation in class discussion, current event report, and research assignments. At the end of the term you will be able to: hold an informed discussion on issues related to environmental and risk assessment, management, and communication. You will also demonstrate that you can apply this knowledge through participating in class activities, analyzing current events, and research assignments.

Required Texts - *ALWAYS* bring textbook, readings, and assignments to class.

There is **one required book** for this course.

M. Granger Morgan, Baruch Fischhoff, Ann Bostrom, Cynthia J. Atman. 2001. *Risk Communication. A Mental Models Approach*. Paperback ISBN: 9780521002561 (noted as Morgan et al. in the calendar).

However, **the majority of the course’s readings will be posted** to myWPI. Students should also regularly access a news source (print, online, or television) to keep up-to-date with current affairs related to domestic environmental issues. Suggested sources: The New York Times, The International Herald Tribune, The Washington Post, or the BBC. Students who have subscriptions to any news source are encouraged to set up email notifications when environment- or risk-related key words appear in-text.

Course Requirements

Plagiarism Tutorial	5% of Class Grade
Current Event Report	10% of Class Grade
Topic Write-up	5% of Class Grade
Annotated Bibliographies (2)	20% of Class Grade
Draft	10% of Class Grade
Final Paper	20% of Class Grade
Final Presentation	10% of Class Grade
Attendance/Participation	20% of Class Grade

Student Responsibilities for the Course

- 1) **Complete reading assignments** before the class meets; the book and assigned readings provide important background for the class lectures. As we proceed, assignments may vary from what the syllabus indicates. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of any updates to the schedule.
- 2) **Attend class** meetings regularly and on time. The lectures provide a framework for understanding risk communication and contain material not in the readings. Attendance will be taken daily and will figure in your course grade, as explained below.
- 3) **Participate** in class discussion. Student participation allows me to evaluate reading comprehension. Class participation also reinforces the ideas and concepts in course assignments. In-class activities may require students to work in groups. Participation grades will also reflect students' contributions during these activities. Students who attend all classes but do not participate in class discussion and activities will receive a maximum of 75% for their Attendance and Participation grade.
- 4) **Complete the plagiarism tutorial.** The plagiarism tutorial will help you better understand what is considered plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarizing while completing the research assignments.
- 5) **Complete the writing assignments** (current event report/research assignments). These assignments provide another way for students to show their understanding of the material. The current event report builds a foundation for our class discussion; the research assignments over the course of the term will help you build your final paper.
- 6) **Present your research findings.** Each student will present the research findings in their final paper on the last day in class. The presentation will help students develop public speaking skills, as well as proficiency in distilling research into an accessible presentation for a non-expert audience.

Calendar	
	The reading assignment listed under a given day is <u>due on that day</u> , i.e. the work listed for Class 2 should be finished before class that day.
Class 1	Introduction to the course: Risk in Every Day Life
Class 2	Concepts of Risk <u>Required Readings:</u> FDA, <i>Communicating Risks and Benefits: An Evidence-Based User's Guide</i> – Chps. 1 & 2; Wildavsky, "Theories of Risk Perception: Who Fears What and Why?"
Class 3	Risk Communications I <u>Required Readings:</u> Morgan et al., Chapter 1; EPA, "Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication"; Fischhoff, "Risk Perception and Communication Unplugged: Twenty Years of Process". <i>Assignments due:</i> Plagiarism tutorial.
Class 4	Risk Communications II <u>Required Readings:</u> Morgan et al., Chapter 2; McComas, "Defining Moments in Risk Communication Research". <i>Assignments due:</i> Topic Write-up

Class 5	<p>Risk Assessment, Management, & Public Policymaking <u>Required Readings:</u> Morgan et al., Chapter 6; FDA, <i>Communicating Risks and Benefits: An Evidence-Based User’s Guide</i> – Chp. 10; Sapolsky, “The Politics of Risk”.</p>
Class 6	<p>Food & Drug Safety <u>Required Readings:</u> Kahan et al., “Cultural cognition of scientific consensus”; Glik, “Risk Communication for Public Health Emergencies”; Wahlberg, “Risk Perception and the Media”; Mythen, “Reframing risk? Citizen journalism and the transformation of news”.</p> <p><i>Assignments due:</i> Current Event Report</p>
Class 7	<p>HIV and Mad Cows <u>Required Readings:</u> Morgan et al., Chapter 8; Stapleton, “The Scandals that Rocked Europe: Tainted Blood, Mad Cow, and Dioxin Contamination”; Wylie, “Mad Cows and Englishmen”; Shilts, reading from <i>And the Band Played On</i></p> <p><i>Assignments due:</i> Annotated Bibliography #1</p>
Class 8	<p>Environmental Risk <u>Required Readings:</u> Morgan et al., Chapter 7; Stern, “Contributions of psychology to limiting climate change”; Braman et al., “Affect, Values, and Nanotechnology Risk Perceptions: An Experimental Investigation”.</p>
Class 9	<p>Natural Disasters <u>Required Readings:</u> Maibach et al., “Global Warming’s Six Americas 2009”; Howe et al., “Mapping the shadow of experience of extreme weather events”; Johnston, “How natural disasters terrorize the business world in one infographic”, EPA, “Natural Disasters”: <i>Students must pick two natural disasters to read from the thirteen listed</i> (Drought to Wildfires; cannot select Earthquakes or Snow & Ice).</p> <p><i>Assignments due:</i> Annotated Bibliography #2</p>

Class 10	<p>Northridge Earthquake <u>Required Readings:</u> EPA, “Earthquakes”, Taylor, “The Northridge Earthquake: 20 Years Ago Today”; USGS, “Northridge, California”; USGS, “USGS Response to an Urban Earthquake – Northridge ’94”; Comfort, “Risk and Resilience: Inter-Organizational Learning Following the Northridge Earthquake”; Schuppe, “Northridge Quake 20 Years Later: 5 Lessons Not Learned”; Becerra, “Earthquake risks have evolved since Northridge.”</p> <p><i>Assignments due:</i> Draft</p>
Class 11	<p>Risks & Hazards of Major Storms <u>Required Readings:</u> Commonwealth of Massachusetts, “Hazards of a Hurricane,” “Winter Storms,” “Major Storm Safety,” and “Hazard Mitigation”; Commonwealth of Massachusetts, “Hazard Mitigation Plan 2013.”</p>
Class 12	<p>Blizzard of ’78 and Winter Storm Juno <u>Required Readings:</u> EPA, “Snow & Ice”; “The Blizzard of ’78”; Video clip of news reporting on the Blizzard of ’78; “Boston’s Ten Biggest Storms”; “Soul-searching at Weather Service after Botched NJ Weather Forecast”; Wachinger, “The Risk Perception Paradox”; NYT, “Leaders in NY & NJ Defend Shutdown.”</p>
Class 13	<p>Hurricane Katrina <u>Required Readings:</u> NYT, “Hurricane Katrina”; Quinn, “Hurricane Katrina: A Social and Public Health Disaster”; Cole & Fellows, “Risk Communication Failure: A Case Study of New Orleans & Hurricane Katrina”; <i>The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned</i>, Chps. 1, 4, and 5.</p>
Class 14	<p><i>Assignments due:</i> Final Presentations & Papers.</p>