

**CJT 780 –Risk and Strategic Communication  
3 Credits**

Time: 6:00-8:30 Tuesdays

*“The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived, and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.” J. F. Kennedy*

**Instructor:** Dr. Timothy L. Sellnow

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**Office:** 310A Lucille Little Fine Arts Building

**Office Hours:** 11:00-12:00 Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays; or by appt.

**Course Description**

This course takes a message-centered approach to the study of risk communication. The course establishes risk communication as a distinct sub-discipline within the communication discipline. Ethical considerations are paramount in all areas covered in the course. Theories of risk communication such as mindfulness, cultural theory, chaos, the constraints of structuration, and renewal discourse are discussed in terms of pre-crisis and post-crisis. Applied research areas such as best practices and health risk are also considered. Ultimately, the course provides an overview of the established and emerging perspectives on risk and crisis from the communication perspective.

**Prerequisites**

Graduate student status

**Course Goals**

- The students will be able to distinguish the parameters of risk communication in the communication discipline.
- The students will be able to select the appropriate communication theory to fit a risk situation.
- The students will be able to compose a scholarly analysis that generates conclusions through the application of an appropriate theory of risk communication in a case study.

**Required Materials**

With the exception of the books listed below, readings will be posted on the course’s blackboard site. The journal articles and chapters included are listed on the weekly schedule. There will also be extensive reading related to the two case studies (see tentative schedule). You will need to purchase the following books:

\*Sellnow, T. L., Ulmer, R. R., Seeger, M. W., & Littlefield, R. S. (2009). *Effective risk*

*communication: A message-centered approach.* New York: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC.

\*Available to students without cost.

### **Description of Course Activities and Assignments**

Application Papers (1 @ 5 points each)	5	points
Subject Matter Expert Papers (1 @ 50 points)	50	points
Final Paper	<u>200</u>	<u>points</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>points</b>

### **Summary Description of Course Assignments**

#### Subject Matter Expert Papers

Students will compose a narrative outline, five double-spaced pages (12-pt. Times New Roman, 1" margins); excluding references, summarizing the readings for the week selected. The paper should include: 1) a paragraph introducing the concept and explaining a rationale for why the concept is relevant to risk communication; 2) three to five overriding themes that appear consistently in the readings. A justification for the selection should be provided using examples with page numbers from the assigned articles; 3) up to one page describing how the concept functions in or has the potential to inform the study of risk communication; 4) a paragraph speculating how the concept is evolving or might evolve in the future; and 5) three to five open-ended questions inspired by the reading that are appropriate for class discussion. The subject matter expert presentation will last approximately one hour. Twenty to thirty minutes will be allocated to the subject matter expert's presentation. The remaining time will be devoted to class discussion. The instructor is open to a wide variety of structural formats for the paper and presentation. Subject matter experts should share a copy of their papers with the other students and instructor.

#### Application Papers

Students are asked to complete two application papers. The application papers should be completed on weeks when the student is not serving as a subject matter expert. Specifically, the application papers involve selecting a case from current events or history that exemplifies or helps to illustrate the concept being discussed. The examples may be presented either orally or by using audio or video materials. The paper should not exceed one double-spaced page (12-pt. Times New Roman, 1" margins). The paper should include a paragraph describing the case, a paragraph explaining why the case is relevant to the concept being covered in class, and a paragraph summarizing some of the conclusions that can be made from the case. To assure an even distribution throughout the semester, the instructor will distribute a schedule allowing students to sign up for the available weeks.

#### Final Paper

The final paper should analyze some aspect of a risk communication by applying an extended review of a specific element of the risk communication literature to an

organization's risk communication planning, previous response to an issue, or both. Students are not limited to the cases covered in class. This paper should take the form of a conference paper or journal article. Papers must include research questions, a rationale, designation of a data set, a review of literature that articulates a methodological stance, an analysis section, and a discussion of conclusions and implications. The paper should conform to the *Publication Manual of American Psychological Association* (2010, Sixth Edition) guidelines. The paper may not exceed 25 double-spaced pages (12-pt. Times New Roman, 1" margins); excluding references, tables, figures, and appendixes.

### **Course Grading**

Final grades will be assigned according to the following scale: A = 92%, B = 85%, C = 75 %,

### **Final Examination**

The final examination for this course will take place in the same room and same time as we meet each week. The specific date is listed on the tentative daily schedule.

### **Course Policies:**

#### **Excused Absences:**

Students need to notify the professor of absences prior to class when possible. S.R. 5.2.4.2 defines the following as acceptable reasons for excused absences: (a) serious illness, (b) illness or death of family member, (c) University-related trips, (d) major religious holidays, and (e) other circumstances found to fit "reasonable cause for nonattendance" by the professor.

Students anticipating an absence for a major religious holiday are responsible for notifying the instructor in writing of anticipated absences due to their observance of such holidays no later than the last day in the semester to add a class. Information regarding dates of major religious holidays may be obtained through the religious liaison, Mr. Jake Karnes (859-257-2754).

Students are expected to withdraw from the class if more than 20% of the classes scheduled for the semester are missed (excused or unexcused) per university policy.

#### **Verification of Absences:**

Students may be asked to verify their absences in order for them to be considered excused. Senate Rule 5.2.4.2 states that faculty have the right to request "appropriate verification" when students claim an excused absence because of illness or death in the family. Appropriate notification of absences due to university-related trips is required prior to the absence.

#### **Academic Integrity:**

Per university policy, students shall not plagiarize, cheat, or falsify or misuse academic records. Students are expected to adhere to University policy on cheating and plagiarism in all courses. The minimum penalty for a first offense is a zero on the assignment on which the offense occurred. If the offense is considered severe or the student has other academic offenses on their record, more serious penalties, up to suspension from the university may be imposed.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious breaches of academic conduct. Each student is advised to become familiar with the various forms of academic dishonesty as explained in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Complete information can be found at the following website: <http://www.uky.edu/Ombud>. A plea of ignorance is not acceptable as a defense against the charge of academic dishonesty. It is important that you review this information as all ideas borrowed from others need to be properly credited.

Part II of Student Rights and Responsibilities (available online <http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Code/part2.html>) states that all academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by students to their instructors or other academic supervisors, is expected to be the result of their own thought, research, or self-expression. In cases where students feel unsure about the question of plagiarism involving their own work, they are obliged to consult their instructors on the matter before submission.

When students submit work purporting to be their own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgement of the fact, the students are guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarism includes reproducing someone else's work, whether it be a published article, chapter of a book, a paper from a friend or some file, or something similar to this. Plagiarism also includes the practice of employing or allowing another person to alter or revise the work which a student submits as his/her own, whoever that other person may be.

Students may discuss assignments among themselves or with an instructor or tutor, but when the actual work is done, it must be done by the student, and the student alone. When a student's assignment involves research in outside sources of information, the student must carefully acknowledge exactly what, where and how he/she employed them. If the words of someone else are used, the student must put quotation marks around the passage in question and add an appropriate indication of its origin. Making simple changes while leaving the organization, content and phraseology intact is plagiaristic. However, nothing in these Rules shall apply to those ideas which are so generally and freely circulated as to be a part of the public domain (Section 6.3.1).

Please note: Any assignment you turn in may be submitted to an electronic database to check for plagiarism.

Accommodations due to disability:

If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations, please see me as soon as possible during scheduled office hours. In order to receive accommodations in this course, you must provide me with a Letter of Accommodation from the Disability Resource Center (Room 2, Alumni Gym, 257-2754, email address: [jkarnes@email.uky.edu](mailto:jkarnes@email.uky.edu)) for coordination of campus disability services available to students with disabilities.

Participation:

Students are encouraged to participate in all lectures/discussions. When students share their experiences with the class, the course material often becomes more interesting and comprehensible.

Social Responsibility:

Students are expected to display the same level of behavior in the classroom that they would enact in a highly professional setting. Specifically, laptops should remain closed, cell phones should be turned off, extraneous reading materials should be put away, and students should eschew side conversations that are outside the class discussion. In addition, remarks that are perceived as racist, sexist, or vulgar should be avoided. Students failing to display social responsibility will be warned once. Future violations will result in ejection from the class session. Consistent violations will result in ejection from the class. (Students with special needs involving computer use for taking notes should notify the instructor.)

Assignment Descriptions:

Students will receive a detailed outline of all assignments at least one week before they are due.

Private Meetings:

Students are highly encouraged to interact with the instructor outside of class. A few minutes with the instructor can often eliminate confusion or anxiety concerning an assignment. Students unable to meet with the instructor during office hours are encouraged to make appointments at other times.

Late Work:

All assignments are due on time. "Make-up" assignments will be allowed only if a compelling excuse is offered. If a compelling excuse is not offered, the instructor will allow the student to complete a version of the assignment for a 10% reduction in total points. Students who fail to turn in papers on time without a compelling excuse will have no makeup opportunities.

Technical Difficulties:

General information about using Blackboard is available at <http://wiki.uky.edu/blackboard>. If you experience technical difficulties with the delivery of the course content, please contact the Information Technology Service Desk (<http://www.uky.edu/ukit/help>) for assistance by calling 218-HELP (218--4357) or emailing [helpdesk@uky.edu](mailto:helpdesk@uky.edu).

## **TENTATIVE WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

Please have all readings completed by the date under which they are listed.

### ***Distinguishing Risk and Crisis Communication as Separate Sub-Disciplines***

*“Society would be safer, smarter, and fairer if our organizations and their masters could admit their limitations, declaring frankly that they cannot control the uncontrollable”—  
Lee Clarke*

**Week 1 (8/30): Where We Were, Where We Are, and Where We Need to Be**

Palenchar, M. J. (2009). Historical trends of risk and crisis communication. In R. L. Heath, & H. D. O’Hair (Eds.), *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (pp. 31-52). New York: Taylor and Francis Group.

Palenchar, M. J. (2010). Risk communication. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 447-460). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

**Week 2 (9/6): “Unique” Ethical Considerations**

*Effective Risk*, Chapter 11

Mitroff, I. I., & Silvers, A. (2010). *Dirty rotten strategies: How we trick ourselves and others into solving the wrong problems precisely*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Chapters 1 & 2)

Heath, R. L., & Ni, L. (2010). Community relations and corporate social responsibility. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp. 557-568). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Anthony, K. E., & Sellnow, T. L. (in press). Beyond Narnia: The necessity of C.S. Lewis’ *First and Second Things* in applied communication research. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*.

**Theories and Perspectives of Risk Communication**

*“Out of clutter find simplicity. From discord, find harmony. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”* Albert Einstein

**Week Three (9/13): Mindfulness**

*Effective Risk*, Chapter 10

Burgoon, J. K., Berger, C. R., & Waldron, V. R. (2000). Mindfulness and interpersonal communication. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(1), 105-127.

Langer. E. J. (2009). *Counterclockwise*. New York: Ballantine Books. Chapters 1-4

Perrow, C. (1999). *Normal accidents: Living with high-risk technology*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Chapters 1-3)

#### **Week 4 9/20): The Precautionary Principle**

*Effective Risk*, Chapter 12

Maguire, S., & Ellis, J. (2009). The precautionary principle and risk communication. In R. L. Heath & H. D. O'Hair (Eds.) *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (pp. 119-137). New York: Routledge.

Som, C., Lorenz, Hity, L. M., & Kohler, A. R. (2009). The precautionary principle as a framework for a sustainable information society. *Journal of Business Communication*, *85*, 493-505.

Myles, L. (2006). Fear and coughing in Toronto: SARS and the uses of risk. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, *31*, 367-389.

#### **Week 5 (9/27): Instructional Messages as Risk and Crisis Communication**

Coombs, W. T. (2009). Conceptualizing crisis communication. In R. L. Heath & H. D. O'Hair (Eds.) *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (pp. 99-118). New York: Routledge.

Sellnow, T. L., & Sellnow, D. D. (2010). The instructional dynamic of risk and crisis communication: Distinguishing instructional messages from dialogue. *The Review of Communication*, *10*(2), 111-125.

Sellnow, T. L., Sellnow, Lane, D. R., Littlefield, R. S. (2011). The value of instructional communication in crisis situations: Restoring order to chaos. *Risk Analysis*.

#### **Week 6 (10/04): Pandemics, Risk Messages, & Popular Culture**

Please complete the discussion board assignment focusing on the movie *Contagion*.

#### **Week 7: (10/11): Organizational Learning, Unlearning, and Structuration**

Poole, M. S., & McPhee, R. D. (2005). Structuration theory. In D. K. Mumby, & S. May (Eds.), *Engaging organizational communication theory & research* (171-196), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McPhee, R. D., & Iverson, J. (in press). Agents of constitution in Communicad:

Constitutive processes of communication in organizations. In L. Putnam, & A. Nicotera (Eds.), *Building theories of organization: the constitutive role of communication*. Abingdon, UK: Rutledge.

Iverson, J. O., & McPhee, R. D. (2008). Communicating knowing through communities of practice: Exploring internal communication processes and differences among CoPs. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 36, 176-199.

### **Week 8 (10/18): The Coordinated Management of Risk Communication at the Community Level**

Tansey, J., & Rayner, S. (2009). Cultural theory and risk. In Heath, R. L., & O'Hair, D. H. (Eds.), *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (53-79). New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis.

Renn, O. (2009). Risk communication: Insights and requirements for designing successful communication programs on health and environmental hazards. In Heath, R. L., & O'Hair, D. H. (Eds.), *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (80-98). New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis.

Firat. A. F., Dholakia, N., Venkatesh, A. (1995). Marketing in a postmodern world. *European journal of Marketing*, 29(1), pp. 40-56.

Torp. S. (2008). Integrated communications: from one look to normative consistency. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 14,(2), 190-206.

### **Week 9 (10/25): Risk Communication as a Discourse of Renewal**

Veil, S. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Heald, M. (in press). Memorializing crisis: The Oklahoma National Memorial as renewal discourse. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*.

Bosdorff, D. M. (2003). George W. Bush's Post-September 11 rhetoric of covenant renewal: Upholding the faith of the greatest generation. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 89, 293-319.

Ulmer, R. R., Seeger, M. W., & Sellnow, T. L. (2007). Post-crisis communication and renewal: Expanding the parameters of post-crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 33, 130-134.

Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2009). Post-crisis communication and

renewal: Understanding the potential for positive outcomes in crisis communication. In R. L. Heath, & H. D. O'Hair (Eds.), *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (pp.). New York: Taylor and Francis Group.

**Applied Research in Risk Communication**

“*The world breaks everyone, and afterward many are strong at the broken places.*”  
Earnest Hemingway

**Week 10 (11/1): Best Practices:**

*Effective Risk*, Chapter 2

Venette, S. J. (2006). Introduction. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34, 229-231.

Seeger, M. W. (2006). Best practices in crisis communication: An expert panel process. Introduction. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34, 232-244.

Heath, R. L. (2006). Best practices in crisis communication: Evolution of practice through research. Introduction. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34, 245-244.

Reynolds, B. (2006). Response to best practices. Introduction. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34, 249-252.

Ropeik, D. (2006). Best practices response. Introduction. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34, 253-256.

Sandman, P. (2006). Crisis communication best practices: Some quibbles and additions.

National Center for Food Protection and Defense (2008). White paper on confounding issues for implementing best practices in risk communication. (Available from National Center for Food Protection and Defense: <http://www.ncfpd.umn.edu/>)

**Week 11 (11/8): Public Health/Crisis Emergency Risk Communication:**

Reynolds, B., & Seeger, M. W. (2005). Crisis and emergency risk communication as an integrative model. *Journal of Health Communication*, 10, 43-55.

Seeger, M. W., Reynolds, B., & Sellnow, T. L. (2009). Crisis and emergency risk

communication in health contexts: Applying the CDC model to pandemic influenza. In R. L. Heath, & H. D. O’Hair (Eds.), *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (pp. 31-52). New York: Taylor and Francis Group.

Veil, S. R., Reynolds, B., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2008). Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication as a theoretical framework for research and practice. *Health Promotion Practice, 9*(4), 26S-34S.

### **Week 12 (11/15): Terrorism:**

Stohl, C., & Stohl, M. (2007). Networks of terror: Theoretical assumptions and Pragmatic consequences. *Communication Theory, 47*(2), 93-124.

Kreps, G. L., Alibek, K., Bailey, C., Neuhauser, L., Rowan, K. E., & Sparks, L. (2005). The critical role of communication to prepare for biological threats: Prevention, mobilization, and response. In H. D. O’Hair, R. L. Heath, & G. R. Ledlow (Eds.), *Community Preparedness and response to terrorism* (Volume 3) (191-210). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Sellnow, T. L., Seeger, M. W., & Ulmer, R. R. (2005). Constructing the “new normal” through post-crisis discourse. In H. D. O’Hair, R. L. Heath, & G. R. Ledlow (Eds.), *Community Preparedness and response to terrorism* (Volume 3) (167-189). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Heath, R. L., & O’Hair, D. H. (2008). Terrorism: From the eyes of the beholder. In H. D. O’Hair, R. L. Heath, K. J. Ayotte, & G. R. Ledlow (Eds.), *Terrorism: Communication and rhetorical perspectives* (pp. 17-42). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

### **Week 13 (11/22): Risk Communication Researchers in Action**

Individual meetings with instructor to discuss status of final paper.

### **Week 14 (11/29): Formal Presentations I**

Half of the students should prepare and deliver their final paper presentations as if they were presenting on a top papers panel at the National Communication Association or International Communication Association. You may invite guests.

### **Week 15 (12/6): Formal Presentations II**

The remaining half of the students should prepare and deliver their final paper presentations as if they were presenting on a top papers panel at the National Communication Association or International Communication Association. You may invite guest.

**Week 16 12/13): Final Examination Period**

Submission of final papers.