

CST 598: Risk Communication

3 semester hours credit

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Course Purpose

This course concentrates on the ways people decide whether and how to react to impending danger. We make such decisions all the time, often intuitively: we obey road signs (when it's convenient), we don't consume poisons (unless they taste wonderful or have happy side effects), we go inside during an electrical storm (unless we're playing golf with the boss), etc. As you can see, managing risk isn't a simple matter of yes/no or do/don't. Our accounting for risks requires judgments that may have little relationship to sheer statistical probability. We adopt and avoid risks based on an array of concerns that involve rational arguments, perceptions of power relationships, risk/benefit assessments, etc. These decision-making factors must be communicated to us, and we in turn must convince ourselves how to prioritize them.

While *hazard* is defined as a potential threat of harm, *risk* includes the perceived severity, likelihood, and immediacy of the hazard. This course examines risk as a product of human perceptions that are molded rhetorically—through words and images that affect the emotional as well as the rational dimensions of risk assessment. While insurance analysts treat risk as statistical probability and toxicologists reduce risk to duration of exposure, we will approach risk as a rhetorical construction. As such, we address the following kinds of questions:

1. How is expertise constructed in public forums? What counts as expertise and why?
2. What role should the technical expert play in policy decisions that affect the general public?
3. What role should the non-expert public have in policy decisions that involve complex scientific and technological issues and evidence?
4. If the public is to participate in such deliberations and decisions, how might it do so effectively and ethically?
5. What factors shape the public reception of complex scientific arguments? How might awareness of these factors lead to construction of more effective appeals?
6. How can we improve our own capability of making prudent decisions regarding risks?
7. How can disputes about risk be adjudicated ethically and effectively?

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Recognize how the degree of a risk is manipulated through its visual and verbal portrayals.
- Identify the major theoretical frameworks for analyzing risk communication.

- Apply theories of risk communication to specific cases, illustrating how risk perceptions were constructed rhetorically.
- Evaluate the efficacy of different strategies for communicating risk in specific cases and contexts.
- Compare and contrast various models of public deliberation about risk, assessing their merits and shortcomings.
- Assess how communication about risk affects economic and social development, especially in North Carolina.

Readings

- Glickman, T. S. & Gough, M. (Eds.). (1990). *Readings in risk*. Washington, DC: Resources for the Future Press. ISBN 0915707551
- Lundgren, R. & McMakin, A. (2004). *Risk communication: A handbook for communicating environmental, safety, and health risks* (3rd ed.). Columbus, OH: Battelle Press. ISBN 1574771426
- Sandman, P. M. (1993). *Responding to community outrage: Strategies for effective risk communication*. Fairfax, VA: American Industrial Hygiene Association. ISBN 093262751X

Dr. Roy's Bill of Student Rights and Responsibilities

- Article 1. You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect as an individual. You are expected to show concern and respect for others, including your fellow students and the professor.
- Article 2. You are entitled to fair and impartial evaluation of your academic performance. *You* will never be evaluated, but your performance will be.
- Article 3. You have the right to ask the reasons for any grade, assignment, or activity and to receive a straightforward response. Questions about individual grades and other personal issues will be addressed privately. Grades always are determined in relation to assignment standards and guidelines.
- Article 4. You have the right (indeed, the obligation) to ask reasonable, relevant questions, whether in class or outside of class. You also have the right to have them answered (or to be advised where to find the answer).
- Article 5. You have the responsibility to attend class regularly, arrive and depart on time, and to be courteous to others.
- Article 6. You have the responsibility to be prepared for class. This responsibility involves doing the required reading, research, and other tasks that are expected. You are responsible for being attentive, alert, and focused on this class (not engaging in activities unrelated to the class).
- Article 7. You have the responsibility to do your own work and to complete it on time.
- Article 8. You have the responsibility to take pride in your work by preparing carefully and to the best of your ability.
- Article 9. The professor is bound by these same rights and responsibilities.

Instructional Methods

I will strive within the bounds of legality and morality to engage you intellectually and to provide a safe, stimulating environment for creative thought. Class sessions will be highly interactive, with students as well as the professor responsible for generating and sustaining lively interactions. We will concentrate on the applications of risk communication frameworks to actual and hypothetical case studies. My role is that of a Socratic gadfly: to prod you toward going beyond uncritical assumptions and to extend your cognitive capabilities. Prepare to operate beyond your intellectual “comfort zone” by being ready for new ideas. That means you should arrive at every class meeting equipped to ask/answer questions and offer original insights relevant to the course material.

A *vital* component of our course is the electronic collection of resources housed on the Blackboard course site. You are expected to:

- Check our course site regularly by logging in to <https://blackboard.uncg.edu> ALL course documents are housed on that site—no paper copies of the syllabus, assignment guidelines, or other documents will be distributed (this is one contribution we make to environmental sustainability).
- Maintain a properly functioning, current UNCG e-mail address. E-mail is the only way I can communicate regularly and efficiently to you beyond class. Make sure your e-mail address is listed correctly in Blackboard, since all class-wide e-mails will be sent through the Blackboard system. Blackboard defaults to your UNCG student e-mail (eSpartan) account. I strongly recommend you keep that account as your Blackboard e-mail setting and check your UNCG e-mail at least once each day. (Various other e-mail systems—notably Hotmail—have a record of incompatibility with Blackboard. Don’t take that risk!) Remember—CHECK YOUR E-MAIL!

Assignments and Grading Scale

Summary of Assignments (Painstakingly detailed guidelines will be available on Blackboard in the <Assignments> content item).

Graduate Students:

- Reaction Papers 6 @ 50 pts. each

In each 2 page (maximum) paper, answer an assigned question on the unit’s readings and/or provide a reaction to the unit’s readings. You will be expected to develop a reasoned response and assessment of the arguments and viewpoints in our readings.

- Midterm Exam 100 pts.

All essay, prospective questions distributed in advance.

- Literature Review 100 pts.

Develop a literature review that documents and discusses the state of scholarly knowledge about a theme in risk communication. The theme will be an outgrowth of one of the content units in the course. The literature will be gleaned from sources beyond the required course readings.

- Research Project 400 pts.

Produce an original research paper addressing the risk communication surrounding an environmental/technological case study in North Carolina. The topic of the research project will

coordinate with the undergraduate consultant project. Graduate students mentor teams of undergraduates whose research focuses on a local case study.

- Proposal (50 pts.)
The proposal includes prospective research questions and theoretical frameworks.
- Peer review of rough drafts from classmates (50 pts.)
Turn in your own rough draft and provide formal, written feedback on drafts written by other students.
- Final paper (300 pts.)
An 18-25 page (excluding references) research paper prepared according to APA style. Envision this paper as a prospective conference paper or submittal for publication.

- Oral Presentation 100 pts.

Present your research project, focusing on objectives, research methods, and findings, to the class in a mock conference setting. You will have approximately 15 minutes for the oral report followed by a Q&A session.

Undergraduate Students:

- Discussion Leadership 100 pts.

You will be expected to guide a 20-30 minute interactive class discussion regarding the readings for a specified class period. A written content outline, list of discussion questions, and application of the readings to a specific example will be required.

- Article Review 2 @ 100 pts. each

For an approved scholarly article not included in the required readings, summarize the content and react to the findings in a 2-3 page original paper.

- Midterm Exam 200 pts.

All essay, prospective questions distributed in advance.

- Participation 100 pts.

Provide original insights regarding current and historical issues in risk communication. Includes completion of in-class exercises, Blackboard blogs, and online discussion forums.

- Consultant Project 300 pts.

You work with a team of students to analyze, critique, and provide recommendations regarding the risk communication surrounding a dispute about technological/environmental developments in the area (North Carolina). Each student plays the role of consultant for a different constituency, preparing the final project report as a research-based report for that constituency. Grades are earned individually.

- Proposal (50 pts.)
The proposal includes prospective research questions and theoretical frameworks.
- Peer review of rough drafts from classmates (50 pts.)
Turn in your own rough draft and provide formal, written feedback on drafts written by other students.
- Final paper (250 pts.)
A 10-15 page (excluding references) research paper prepared according to APA style.
- Oral Presentation 100 pts.

Based on the work for your consultant project, present your recommendations for your constituency and justify those recommendations in light of what you have learned in the course. Compare and contrast your recommendations with those offered by other members of your team

for their constituencies. We will allocate approximately 10 minutes per person, followed by Q&A.

Course Grading Scale

A+ = 971+	A = 931-970	A- = 900-930
B+ = 871-899	B = 831-870	B- = 800-830
C+ = 771-799	C = 731-770	C- = 700-730
D+ = 671-699	D = 631-670	D- = 600-630
F = < 600		

Grades are based on points earned, not percentages. (Blackboard displays both, so pay attention to the points.) Grades are posted in the Blackboard gradebook as soon as they are tabulated for each assignment. Late work is penalized at least one letter grade per day late (weekends and holidays included). Remember that grades are the result, not the objective, of your efforts.

Special Accommodations

UNCG seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with the Office of Disability Services located at 215 Elliott University Center (<http://www.uncg.edu/ods>; 334-5440). Accommodations will be made only for students who have documented special needs through the Office of Disability Services. The Office of Disability Services can refer you to appropriate diagnostic testing as well as document existing needs. To assure your needs are met, please register with Disability Services as early as possible.

Attendance

We can learn from each other as much as from a book or a professor. It is, therefore, important to attend and participate. For each absence above two (2) class periods, 5% points will be deducted from your final course grade. A tardy (late arrival or early departure) is equivalent to half an absence; tardies of more than half a class period count as a full absence. Sleeping, engaging in activities unrelated to class (such as working on assignments for other classes), and offensive or disruptive behavior (including text messaging, talking on your cell phone in class) counts as an unexcused absence. (Yes, even I have had my cell phone ring during class, so just remember to mute electronic devices. You'll get one warning if your cell phone rings, since anyone can make a mistake. After that, the absence penalty applies.) If special circumstances require an exception, please meet with me as soon as possible so we can arrange proper accommodations.

There are four legitimate excuses for absences: personal illness (hangovers and hangnails don't count), mandatory religious obligations, personal emergencies (real catastrophes), and official university-sponsored activities (e.g., intercollegiate athletics, academic conferences, etc.) that are scheduled in advance. For an absence to be excused, it must be appropriately documented. You are ALWAYS responsible for material covered, assigned, or performed whether you are in class or not on any particular day. This responsibility includes orientation to course policies. If you add the class late, please meet with me as soon as possible to catch up on what you missed. Daily

assignments cannot be made up if they are missed. You assume the responsibility to notify your instructor in advance of an absence or, if that is not possible, within one (1) class period after the absence. Excuses offered weeks or months after the fact are not considered favorably and likely will not be acceptable.

Computer Policy

Personal computers are NOT allowed in class unless specifically requested by the professor. When we need to use a computer in class, we will use the workstation in the classroom. If computers are needed for group work in class, we will designate who will bring their laptops to class. Let's communicate with each other, not with a computer screen. Instead of Facebooking, shopping, watching videos, working on assignments for other classes, or other distractions, we will engage in the novel activity of speaking directly with each other, paying attention to each other's ideas, listening, and responding to one another. Unauthorized computer usage in class counts as an unexcused full day's absence (since the user is not engaged in the class).

Academic Honesty

It is the responsibility of everyone in the UNCG community to understand and uphold the university's Academic Honor policy. All students should become familiar with the Honor policy by reading the appropriate sections of the current *UNCG Undergraduate Bulletin* and the *UNCG Policies for Students*. You will sign or (in the case of electronic work) assent to a statement of academic integrity for all major work submitted in this course. Violation of the Honor Policy will result in full and appropriate penalty.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating. All students must do their own work to maximize their learning experience. To submit a paper, oral presentation, electronic assignment, or any item that is in part or in whole the work of another unaccredited person is plagiarism. Students found guilty of plagiarism will be penalized to the fullest appropriate extent of university regulations and be reported under the guidelines on academic dishonesty found in the current *Undergraduate Bulletin*.

To avoid plagiarism, those who use words or ideas (including spoken, printed, electronically retrieved, or recorded sources) from another person's work must document the source.

To document a direct quotation in APA style, writers must:

1. include quotation marks around the material or indent it within the text to indicate their use of the source;
2. provide parenthetical notation indicating the date (required), page number (if available); and
3. include the name of the author (if available) or the title (if no author is given) either in the introduction to the quotation or within the parenthetical citation.

To document a direct quotation in an oral presentation, speakers must:

1. say the word "quote" to verbally replace written quotation marks; and
2. include the name of the author (if available) or the title (if no author is given) either immediately before or after the quotation; and
3. outline oral presentations consistent with the above rules for written material.

Instead of quoting writers or speakers, you may paraphrase the facts and ideas of others by fully digesting the concepts, then stating them in your own words and sentence structure; but you must still credit the sources as in the above notes.

Style Statement

This course requires usage of the APA (American Psychological Association) style as described in the 5th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* for all materials submitted for academic credit. Use of another style may result in a reduced grade unless authorized in advance. APA citation guidelines may be found in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.

How to Win

Students often ask me how to do well in courses. To answer this question, I have compiled a composite list of the characteristics the best students exhibit. Rather than seeking to satisfy minimal requirements (i.e., meeting standards), winning means exceeding standards. Winning performance involves:

- demonstrating curiosity about intellectual issues by raising thoughtful, relevant questions;
- showing evidence of careful and thorough preparation (e.g., attention to detail, planning and editing, rigorous practice);
- voluntarily making tasks more challenging by focusing on improving performance rather than meeting minimal requirements;
- seeking feedback on ideas from colleagues and offering your insights and abilities to them;
- actively participating in class by guiding discussion toward issues you find interesting or problematic;
- focusing on how future performance can be improved rather than on how past performance can be excused;
- approaching coursework proactively by consulting with the professor about your ideas, prospective approaches, or puzzlement;
- approaching tasks and discussions from original or inventive perspectives.

**CST 598: Risk Communication
Projected Course Schedule**

Date	Topic To Be Covered
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Communication: Principles and Approaches • Defining Risk and Hazard • Rhetorical Interface Between Science and Persuasion
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediating Risk Perception Through Visual Images, Interpersonal Relationships, and Mass Media • Discursive Tools of Risk Communication: Storytelling, Narratology, Metaphor, Hyperbole, and Science Fiction
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Disputes and Outrage
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral Panic, Blame, and the Role of Transparency
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberative Frameworks for Communicating Risk: Decision-Making Models
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological Debates: Mistrust in Science and Quantitative Risk Assessment • Apathy and Stigma as Factors in Communicating Risk
Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivating Trust and Implementing Ethical Guidelines: The Precautionary Principle and Uncertainty
Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calculating Risk: Manipulating Magnitudes, Cost/Benefit Trade-offs, and Balancing Probability with Consequence
Week 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and Quantifying Stakeholders: The Public Sphere, Publics, and Counterpublics
Week 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Arenas for Risk Debates: Regulatory Schema (the courts and the regulators)
Week 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From Risk to Crisis: Crisis Communication and Response to Emergencies
Week 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary Risks: Automotive Safety; Alcohol and Tobacco; Sexual Behavior
Week 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Studies: (1) Nuclear Fission for Electricity Generation; (2) Mad Cow Disease; (3) HIV/AIDS (These may change based on student interest)
Week 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Studies: (1) Genetically Modified Seeds and Foods; (2) Terror Alerts (Post 9-11); (3) Nanotechnology
Week 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultant Project Meetings and Research Workshops
Week 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultant Project and Research Paper Presentations