RISK COMMUNICATION

Course Goals: Risk is a major concept in modern society. The goals of this course are (1) to train students in the practice of risk communication, (2) to study how communication works with situations of everyday hazards and with crises, and (3) to enable students to conduct case studies that learn from experiences in the health, environmental and industry fields.

Overview: This course is an introduction to how society thinks about, evaluates, debates and discovers risks in the external environment and within the human body. Part I of the course studies an anthropological perspective, answering the question of how all societies seem to construction notions of “jeopardy,” “harm,” and prudent conduct in relation to risk. Some theorists believe our society is not unique in the way it deals with risks, and that the whole matter is reflects a style of political argument; others argue that ours is a unique “risk” society due to modern science and technology. Part II of the course examines Risk Perception, spanning topics from models of individual choice to social influence and crisis response. Part III is an intense examination of risk and the ecology as a variety of case studies illustrate how scientific uncertainty and regulatory decision making combine to intensify and resolve public feelings of uncertainty. Part IV of the course examines a variety of medical controversy, each with its own unique communicative predicaments due to questions of rights, privacy, inclusiveness, treatment certainty, legitimacy and alterations of the constitution of human life. The conclusion of the course reexamines the beginning debate over the nature of risk.


Web Explorations: The course will address current British experience with crisis, with alerts to RSS feeds, television, and Internet Reports. The class will keep track of Oxfam's efforts to represent and deal with international crises as well as those of other NGOs.
**Course Requirements:** The course will be based 30% on participation which involves class discussion and a couple of short reports. A final paper will be required (10 pages) which should assess a current hazard situation will count for 30% and a take-home examination will count 40% (divided up into a preparation grade midway through and a final grade).
RISK COMMUNICATION

(1) INTRODUCTION: How do we communicate about personal, professional and public risks? What happens when precautions go wrong and how is the reputation of a company and its brand protected? Why are some risks socially sanctioned and others outlawed? Why do risks not comport rationally with likelihood and severity? Why do populations keep being exposed to the same risks over time? How can you develop the skills necessary to deal with risk communication in ordinary situations and in times of crisis?

(2) RISK & MODERN TIMES: Are the risks of modern society unique or has risk culture always served a logic of human relationship with one another and the natural world? Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky Risk and Culture, pp. 1-66

(3) RISK CULTURES: What distinguishes the mainstream risk-regulating culture from fringe, apocalyptic movements? How are definitions of hazards generated and culture maintained? Mary Douglas and Arron Wildavsky, Risk and Culture, pp. 67-151

(4) WHY DO PEOPLE TAKE RISKS? This seminar addresses theories of risk taking and what was learned from seat belt regulation and automobiles. Paul Slovik, Perception of Risk, pp. 1-79

(5) WHAT ARE ACCEPTABLE HAZARDS? This section addresses how risks are perceived, how individuals assess risks, and what kinds of risks are deemed socially acceptable and which are outlawed. Paul Slovik, Perception of Risk, 80-153.

(6) RISK, TECHNOLOGY AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE This section addresses how hazards are socially constructed and amplified. We will discuss the Toyota issue in car safety. Paul Slovik, Perception of Risk, 154-232.

(7) WHAT MAKES FOR GOOD RISK COMMUNICATION? Suppose you are assigned to provide risk communication for a company or government agency. How would you do it? The authors discuss practical preparation, techniques, and strategies. Regina Lundgren and Andrea McMakin, Risk Communication, 1-110.
CLASSIC CASES IN POOR RISK COMMUNICATION
Mad Cow disease initially was a British issue. The two Canadian scholars draw from international problems of dealing involving government, environment, and industry/agriculture.

“Mad Cows or Crazy Communication.” *MCMM*, pp. 3-26
“A Diagnostic for Risk Communication Failures.” *MCMM*, pp. 26-40

CLASSIC CASES IN POOR RISK COMMUNICATION & INDUSTRY: This class identifies the problem of stigma (guilt) management and industry practices.

“Dioxins or Chemical Stigmata,” *MCMM*, pp. 41-76
“Hamburger Hell,”*MCMM*, pp. 77-99
“Silicone Breasts;” *MCMM*, pp. 99-122

ECOLOGY: RISK AND THE REGULATORY PROCESS
These cases identify international issues related to biological processes and accidental/waste disposals.

“Lost in Regulatory Space RBST,” *MCMM*, pp. 123-153
“Gene Escape,” *MCMM*, pp. 153-181
“Mother’s Milk,” *MCMM*, pp. 182-210
“Ten Lessons,” *MCMM*, pp. 210-227

HEALTH RISKS: CONTROVERSIES SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PERSONAL HAZARD
These debates concern social responsibility and the emergence of harms from lack of access to screening, treatment and care on the one hand and too much access to consumer items on the other.

"Obesity Epidemic," *CQ Researcher*, January 2003

HEALTH RISKS: CONTROVERSIES OVER PERSONAL CHOICE AND OUTCOMES: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?
These debates focus on life-style choices for handling risk. How do hazards arise from everyday life? What are the solutions?

"Sleep Deprivation," *CQ Researcher*, February 2010
"Medication Abuse," *CQ Researcher*, October 2009
"Homeopathy Debate," *CQ Researcher*, December 2003

COMMUNICATION CRISIS: EPIDEMICS & DISASTERS
This seminar examines handling risk from an international perspective, ranging from the image of states to non-governmental organizations.


(14) THE POLITICS OF CRISIS: Who Should be Saved?
This seminar contrasts ideal or best practices of crisis communication with the heightening of political controversy during times of crisis.

(15) STRATEGIC USE OF THE MEDIA: IMAGES AND ISSUES