Course Description: Introduction to the design and implementation of public-focused risk communication as it relates to environmental, agricultural and public health contexts.

Prerequisites: Graduate standing or permission of instructor

Course Objectives:
This course is designed to help students...

1. Understand the psychological and socio-cultural factors that influence the success of risk communication messaging.
2. Know how to design, implement, and evaluate a successful, public-focused risk communication effort.

Course Format: Class time will largely be based on discussion and small group activities. An interactive approach such as this makes your attendance and participation a crucial component of achieving success in this course.

Assignments and Exams:

1. Risk Assessment Paper – 5-8 pages, double-spaced, where you assess the calculated risk associated with a specific hazard (i.e., identify the “expert model” for the risk). You should pick a risk that is of interest to you – health hazards for health communication, environmental hazards for environmental communication. Use any available outside research/resources about your hazard (including personal interviews). Be sure to include at least 5 sources from outside of class. Specifically, your paper should examine the following aspects:

   a. Hazard: What is the hazard? How does it come to be in the world around us? What is the mechanism by which the hazard does its supposed harm?
   b. Exposure: How are humans exposed to the risk? Where? When? What are the key risk factors? Specifically, how do exposures vary over time, by location, or by subpopulations? How much exposure does it take to experience a negative consequence?
   c. Consequences: What negative consequences occur as a result of exposure to the hazard? How does the hazard pose harm? To what people? To how many people? Who is most at risk/vulnerable? Is the harm short-term or long-term, fatal or not, etc.? Are the consequences health-based? Economic? Environmental?
d. **Probability:** What is the probability of harm? What is the likelihood of the negative consequences identified above to the general population? To specific sub-groups or populations?

2. **Risk Perception Paper** – 5-8 pages, double-spaced, where you assess the perceived risk associated with the hazard you focused on for the assessment paper (i.e., identify the “mental model” for the particular audience you will target in your risk communication paper). Use any available outside research/resources about public perception and your target audience (related to this hazard and otherwise, and including personal interviews). Be sure to incorporate at least 5 sources from outside of class. Specifically, your paper should examine the following aspects:

   a. **Risk perceptions:** What is the perception of risk/level of outrage toward this hazard? How do people perceive the risk in terms of its critical characteristics (e.g., voluntary nature, level of control, catastrophic nature of consequences)? How does this perception vary by different sub-groups or populations at risk? Why do the different groups perceive the risk this way? Does the public perception of risk differ from the expert assessment of the risk? If so, how? Is the risk deemed “acceptable”? Why or why not? Whose perceptions and behavior are most critical to managing the risk or minimizing the harm posed by the hazard?

   b. **Target audience:** What audience do you plan to target with your communication effort? What is critical to know about this audience? What is their level of knowledge about the hazard/risk? What are their relevant beliefs and misperceptions? What are the critical barriers preventing appropriate action?

   c. **Recommendations for risk communication content:** How might one increase the alignment between expert assessments and the perceptions of this particular audience? What key beliefs/perceptions need to change to promote appropriate action? What other factors might you need to take into consideration in designing your risk communication effort? Identify at least 3 key lessons learned about this audience and the risk that you will use to build your risk communication effort.

3. **Risk Communication Paper** – 5-8 pages, double-spaced, where you take your analysis of the expert and mental models associated with the risk, and develop a risk communication campaign. Be sure to address not just what you would say and do, but how you would present information and engage your audience. Address how your approach addresses relevant socio-psychological processes and incorporates the specific knowledge you gained about your audience. Specifically, make sure to explain why you chose this approach or strategy based on the best available science. While the project is theoretical, your proposal for the campaign should be realistic and implementable. In other words, if you want to run television advertisements about your hazard, you should be able to supply me with a storyboard for the advertising campaign. If you want to use brochures, you will need to turn in sample brochure ideas. You will need to use at least 5 references from the course, additional outside references and resources are encouraged. Specifically, your paper should examine the following aspects:

   1. **Background:** Briefly recap the first two papers - how does expert versus public perception differ? Who is the target audience of the effort? What are the critical beliefs and other audience characteristics that you will address?

   2. **Goals:** What are the objectives and goals of your risk communication effort? To inform? To change behavior? Etc.
3. **Approach:** What is your approach or method? Will you use a social media campaign? Create brochures? Develop a public service announcement? One-on-one interactions? How will you carry it out? Why is this approach appropriate based on knowledge gained from the class?

4. **Ethics and Constraints:** Are there ethical issues or other potential constraints that need to be addressed? If so, how are you addressing them?

5. **Messaging:** What is your message? Provide an example to be used in the campaign. How are you framing the information? Why? How are you presenting any relevant data about the hazard/risk? Why? How does this message account for relevant psychological processes and motivations? What are they?

6. **Evaluation:** Why do you expect your approach and specific messaging to be successful? How will you evaluate your effort?

4. **Case Study Applications** – With a partner (or partners) you will present a case study application at the end of the semester in about 1 hour of class time. You will work together to identify a hazard for which there have been multiple past or ongoing risk communication efforts. You will provide readings for the class (if necessary to provide background information in advance), and present a summary of the past and ongoing efforts (what was the effort? how were messages presented? etc.). Finally, you will lead a class critique of the strengths and weaknesses of the effort given the knowledge you gained in this course. Be sure to address how you would improve the effort going forward. Do not just “lecture” at the class; find ways to incorporate the class in the critique through discussion or other activities.

5. **Attendance and Participation** – Your attendance and participation grade will be \( \frac{1}{4} \) based on attendance, \( \frac{1}{4} \) based on engagement in class discussion, \( \frac{1}{4} \) based on the quality of the reflections you post on Carmen, and \( \frac{1}{4} \) based on your review of current peer-reviewed literature in class. Specifically, prior to each class, you need to submit at least 3 questions you would like to discuss from the readings, as well as an application or insight you gained from the readings. This should be submitted to the discussion board set up on Carmen, and it is due by midnight the day before class. If you cannot attend class on a particular day, you can still receive partial credit for that day by submitting your questions and application on Carmen (half of the daily points). You must also pick one class session where you will read the “optional” reading and summarize it for class discussion.

**Grading:**

- Risk Assessment Paper \( 20\% \)
- Risk Perception Paper \( 20\% \)
- Risk Communication Paper \( 20\% \)
- Case Study Application \( 20\% \)
- Attendance and Participation \( 20\% \)

**TOTAL** \( 100\% \)

The course syllabus, schedule, and assigned readings are subject to change. The syllabus can be made available in alternative formats upon request; students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor and for seeking available assistance in a timely manner.
**Class Readings:** All required readings will be available through CARMEN.

We will draw heavily on three particular sources:


**Make-up and Late Assignments:** In-class assignments or points cannot be made up. Late papers will be accepted, but will be docked 5 points for each day that they are late.

**Academic Misconduct:** It is expected that all students have read and understand the University's *Code of Student Conduct*, and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's *Code of Student Conduct* and this syllabus may constitute “Academic Misconduct.” The Ohio State University’s *Code of Student Conduct* (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: “Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process.” Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination. Ignorance of the University’s *Code of Student Conduct* is never considered an “excuse” for academic misconduct.

If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. If COAM determines that you have violated the University’s *Code of Student Conduct* (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University. If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me.

Other sources of information on academic misconduct (integrity) to which you can refer include:

- The Committee on Academic Misconduct web pages
  - [http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html](http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html)
- *Ten Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity*
  - [http://oaa.osu.edu/coamtensuggestions.html](http://oaa.osu.edu/coamtensuggestions.html)
- *Eight Cardinal Rules of Academic Integrity*
  - [http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/rules.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/rules.html)
Class Schedule and Readings

Week 1 (1/14) – Introduction to Course Concepts
- Lundgren and McMakin – Ch. 1 (Intro) pp. 1-7 & Ch. 5 (Ethics), pp. 57-70

Week 2 (1/21) – Calculated and Perceived Risk
- Ropeik and Gray – Ch. 1 (Intro) pp. 1-20 (and skim Ch.19/20 (Air Pollution) pp. 151-180 for a detailed example of risk assessment)
- Cox – Ch. 6 (Environmental Dangers and the Public), pp. 189-222

Week 3 (1/28) - Introduction to Evidence-Based Communication
- FDA Guide – Ch 1-4 (Goals and Evaluation), pp. 1-30
- Lundgren and McMakin - Ch. 7 (Purpose), pp. 85-90

Week 4 (2/4) – Mental Models and Numeracy
- FDA Guide – Ch. 6 (Definitions), Ch. 7 (Quantitative Information) & Ch. 8 (Qualitative Information), pp. 41-76
- Lundgren and McMakin - Ch. 8 (Audience Analysis), pp. 91-104

Week 5 (2/11) – Emotion and Information Processing
- FDA Guide – Ch. 10 (Affect and Emotion), Ch. 11 (Information and Persuasion), Ch. 12 (Across the Life Span) – pp. 89-120

RISK ASSESSMENT PAPER DUE – Midnight, Sunday February 14th
Week 6 (2/18) – Fear Appeals and Perceived Efficacy


Week 7 (2/25) – Risk Information Seeking and Processing


Week 8 (3/3) – Cultural Cognition and Identity-Based Reasoning


Week 9 (3/10) – Public Participation and Social Trust


**RISK PERCEPTION PAPER DUE – Midnight, Sunday March 13th**

**SPRING BREAK – 3/14-3/18**
Week 10 (3/24) – Planning Your Risk Communication Effort
- Lundgren and McMakin - Ch. 6 (Principles of Risk Comm), pp. 71-82

Week 11 (3/31) – Planning Your Risk Communication Effort
- Lundgren and McMakin - Ch. 9 (Developing the Message), Ch 10 (Determining Methods), Ch 11 (Setting a Schedule), Ch 12 (Developing a Plan), pp. 105-141

Week 12 (4/7) – Planning Your Risk Communication Effort
- Lundgren and McMakin – Ch. 13 (Information Materials), Ch. 14 (Visual Representations), pp. 145-190
- Recommended based on what is relevant for your paper: Lundgren and McMakin, Ch. 15 (Face to Face Communication), Ch. 16 (Working with the Media), Ch. 17 (Stakeholder Participation), Ch. 19 (Evaluating Risk Comm Efforts)

Week 13 (4/14) – Group Case Studies
- Readings TBD

Week 14 (4/21) – Group Case Studies
- Readings TBD

RISK COMMUNICATION PAPER DUE – Midnight, Sunday, April 24th

Final Group Case Studies (Final Exam Slot) – TBD, 4/26 or 4/27