

Seminar in Communication Theory: Risk Communication

CMST 7913-01, Wed. 3:30-6:30, Coates 153

Dr. Jean “Renee” Edwards

Professor

Office Hours: MW 10:00-10:30, 1:00-2:00

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Course Description

The topic of risk is one that permeates our lives in some manner nearly every day. In big decisions such as whether to go to the doctor when we feel sick or small decisions such as simply getting in the car and driving to work, we are always weighing the risks (consciously or unconsciously) of the decisions we make. The purpose of this seminar is to examine definitions of risk, factors contributing to perceptions of risk, and (using this information) strategies for communicating most effectively about risk.

Learning Objectives

- To understand the eight historical stages of the development of risk communication and management
- To understand the different ways in which risk can be defined, and to define in the student’s particular area of interest
- To understand the key theories and philosophical foundations of the study of risk and risk communication
- To understand the different factors which influence risk perception in individuals and groups
- To understand the different factors which must be taken into account when crafting risk communication messages
- To understand the biases that could inhibit proper risk perception, and how to counter-act those biases
- To understand the role of mass media in constructing risk perceptions, and some of the current issues mass media is currently facing in constructing that risk

Required Textbooks

Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K.A. (Eds.). (2015). *The SAGE handbook of risk communication*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. ** This will be available free of charge as an electronic book from the LSU Library.

Douglas, M. and Wildavsky, A. (1982). *Risk and culture: An essay on the selection of technological and environmental dangers*. London, England: University of California. (~\$27.00)

Meyer, R, and Kunreuther, H. (2017). *The ostrich paradox: Why we underprepare for disasters*. Philadelphia, PA: Wharton Digital Press. (~\$17.00)

Recommended Texts

Johnson, B., and Covello, V. (Eds.). (1987). *The social and cultural construction of risk: Essays on risk selection and perception*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Reidel.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Silver, N. (2012). *The signal and the noise: Why so many predictions fail – but some don't*. New York, NY: Penguin Books. (< \$20.00) (Chapter 4 is required reading)

Evaluation

Final paper	30%
Reaction papers and posts	20%
Presentation and discussion leadership	10%
Other assignments and activities	10%
Final exam or position paper or group project or technical report	10%
Class participation	20%

Grading Scale

A+	97-100	C+	77-79.99
A	93-96.99	C	73-76.99
A-	90-92.99	C-	70-72.99
B+	87-89.99	D+	67-69.99
B	83-86.99	D	63-66.99
B-	80-82.99	D-	60-62.99

Final Paper

Although all CMST doctoral students will write a research paper, master's students have the option of a research paper or an applied project. As an example of an applied project, you could select a risk-related issue that occurs in Louisiana (e.g., hurricanes or lung cancer) and create a set of messages or analyze existing messages using theory and research about risk

communication. The paper for an applied project will include a review of research and theory relevant to risk along with the practical application. The two components should be roughly equal in their coverage. Applied projects will be 12-15 pages, not including references, tables, and cover page.

A research paper will be suitable for submission to a conference or a journal. It may be an extensive research review, theoretical formulation, detailed research proposal, or a report of original research. Research papers will be 15-20 pages, not including references, tables, abstract, and cover page. It must include a cover letter to an existing journal editor “as if” it were being submitted to a particular journal. You should use good judgment when selecting a journal for your paper.

For both types of papers:

1. Topic and approach must be approved in advance
2. Data collection must be approved by the LSU Institutional Review Board
3. Deadlines for topics, reference lists, outlines, sections of the literature review, and other components of the paper will be spread throughout the semester. You will make periodic progress reports in class and offer feedback to other students on their projects.
4. Papers should follow the most recent version of the APA manual including 12-point Times New Roman font and 1” margins. You should own a copy of this manual! For quick reference, see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>.

Reaction papers and posts

For eight (of the eleven) sessions with assigned readings, you will write a reaction paper with questions and post it on a Moodle forum for that session. Posts are due by NOON on Wednesday. Each reaction paper should include the following:

1. A summary of one or more points made in each article or chapter (up to a total of 3) that you found particularly interesting or important or unclear. The summaries, which should identify the topic and page number, should be no more than two or three sentences per reading.
2. An analysis or response for each reading, based on your reactions to the point you summarized. You may make a connection to other readings or theories, you may discuss the implications for a particular topic or line of research, you may posit practical uses of the information, or you may brainstorm a study that grows from the topic. Your analysis should be about one paragraph.
3. Relevant questions. List three open-ended questions that grow out of your analysis. For example: How does theory “X” align with this topic? Can risk managers use this information to ...? What are the possibilities for research on?

You will write one reaction for each reading (each with a summary, analysis, and list of questions). Each reaction will be about ½ to ¾ of a page long, and no longer than one page (single spaced).

Presentation and discussion leadership

You will lead class or one set of readings. You should begin with a 10-minute to 15-minute introduction to the topic in which you define/explain important concepts, summarize research on the topic, and relate the topic to relevant theories. You may use activities and any form of media to enhance your presentation, but you are not required to do so. Your introduction should be interesting as well as informative; it should enhance our desire to understand the topic. You may focus your talk on one of the readings or incorporate elements from all of them. After your introductory remarks, you are responsible for leading the class discussion on the topic for an additional 15 minutes. You will have prepared questions and discussion topics to stimulate participation.

Other assignments and activities

This category includes submissions related to your paper (e.g. topic and reference list), peer feedback, paper presentation, and other assignments as needed.

Final exam or position paper or group project or technical report

Students may take a final exam (similar to the in-house general exam at the end of your degree program), write one or two position papers (totaling 10 pages), participate in a group project (TBD), or write an article for the *Southern Climate Monitor*.

Class participation

This will be a discussion-based seminar. It is essential that you not only study the assigned readings before class but that you think about them and their implications. The reaction papers are designed to help focus and articulate your thoughts on some of the topics. Your contributions to class discussion, however, should not be limited to the topics in your reaction papers. You should be able to respond to and build on your classmates' comments, which will likely be on different topics. You should review their posts on Moodle before class.

Every student should have and exercise the opportunity to participate fully during every class meeting. Participation, understood broadly, includes listening attentively to classmates, thinking about their contributions, and perhaps responding to them as well as initiating topics for others to build on. Class participation is not a competition to see who can talk the most.

Of course, you are expected to attend every class session unless you have a university-excused reason (<https://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/policiesprocedures/files/2014/09/PS22-R04.pdf>). Contact me as soon as possible if you miss class.

A final note on participation: I understand that students have different learning styles, personalities, and needs. Please talk with or email me *as soon as possible* if you want to request some accommodation for this requirement.

Notice

The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a coordinator in the Office for Disability Affairs (112 Johnston Hall) so that such accommodations may be arranged. After you receive your accommodation letters, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of the accommodations as soon as possible (at least a week before the first exam).

Anticipated Calendar: (readings from required books are highlighted)

Session 1: Introduction to course and each other.

Risk Communication as an Object of Study (August 22)

Plough, A., and Krimsky, S. (1987). The emergence of risk communication studies: Social and political context. *Science, Technology, and Human Values*, 12 (3/4), 4-10.

Fischhoff, B. (1995). Risk perception and communication unplugged: Twenty years of process. *Risk Analysis*, 15 (2), pp 137-145. doi: 10.1111/j.1539-6924.1995.tb00308

Also, watch the following video (2:14) by the World Health Organization (WHO). Although it is simplistic, it shows efforts to make the topic of risk communication more understandable to lay-people. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDX3m20u0Nw>)

Session 2: Defining Risk (August 29)

Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K.A. (2015). Introduction: Explicating communication in risk communication. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K.A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. 1-6). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (Introduction)

Douglas, M. and Wildavsky, A. (1982). *Risk and culture: An essay on the selection of technological and environmental dangers*. London, England: University of California. Read pp. 1-15.

Fischhoff, B., Watson, S.R., and Hope, C. (1984). Defining risk. *Policy Sciences*, 17 (2), 123-139. doi: 10.1007/BF00146924

Session 3: Foundations and Risk Perception (Sept 5)

Douglas, M. and Wildavsky, A. (1982). *Risk and culture: An essay on the selection of technological and environmental dangers*. London, England: University of California. Read Chapters 1 & 2 (pp 16-48).

Bodemer, N., and Gaissmaier, W. (2015). Risk perception. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. 10-23). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (Chapter 1)

Dickert, S., Vastfjall, D., Mauro, R., and Slovic, P. (2015). The feeling of risk: Implications for risk perception and communication. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. 41-54). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (Chapter 3)

Slovic, P., Fischhoff, B., and Lichtenstein, S. (1982). Why study risk perception? *Risk Analysis*, 2(2), 83-93. doi: 10.1111/j.1539-6924.1982.tb01369.x

Session 4: The Psychometric Paradigm (Sept 12)

Slovic, P. (2016). Understanding perceived risk: 1978-2015. *Environment Magazine*, Jan/Feb., 25-29. doi: 10.1080/00139157.2016.1112169

Fischhoff, B., Slovic, P., Lichtenstein, S., Read, S., and Combs, B. (1978). How safe is safe enough? A psychometric study of attitudes toward technological risks and benefits. *Policy Sciences*, 9, 127-152. doi: 10.1007/BF00143739

Session 5: Paper updates and discussion. Group project?? Guest speaker?? (Sept 19)

Session 6: Theories of Risk Communication, Part 1 (Sept 26)

Beck, U. (2009). Critical theory of world risk society: A cosmopolitan vision. *Constellations*, 16(1), 3-22. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8675.2009.00534.x

Kasperson, R. E., Renn, O., Slovic, P., Brown, H. S., Emel, J., Goble, R., Kasperson, J. X., and Ratick, S. (1988). The social amplification of risk: A conceptual framework. *Risk Analysis*, 8(2), 177-187. doi: 10.1111/j.1539-6924.1988.tb01168.x

Hertwig, R., and Frey, R. (2015). The challenge of the description-experience gap to the communication of risks. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. 24-40). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (Chapter 2)

Session 7: Theories of Risk Communication, Part 2 (Oct 3)

Reyna, V. F. (2008). A theory of medical decision making and health: Fuzzy trace theory. *Medical Decision Making*, 28(6), 850-865. doi: 10.1177/0272989X08327066

Broniatowski, D. A. and Reyna, V.F. (2017). A formal model of fuzzy-trace theory: Variations on framing effects and the allais paradox. *Decision*, 1-48. doi: 10.1037/dec0000083

Rimal, R. N. and Real, K. (2006). Perceived risk and efficacy beliefs as motivators of change: Use of the risk perception attitude (RPA) framework to understand health behaviors. *Human Communication Research*, 29(3), 370-399. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.2003.tb00844.x

Anthony, K. E., Sellnow, T. L., and Millner, A. G. (2013). Message convergence as a message-centered approach to analyzing and improving risk communication. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. 41(4), 346-364. doi: 10.1080/00909882.2013.844346

Session 8: Risk Communication Messages (Oct 10)

Brust-Renck, P. G., Reyna, V. F., Corbin, J. C., Royer, C. E., and Weldon, R. B. (2015). The role of numeracy in risk communication. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. 134-145). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (Chapter 9)

Reimer, T., Jones, C., and Skubisz, C. (2015). Numeric communication of risk. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. 166-179). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (Chapter 11)

Cho, H. and Friley, B. (2015). Narrative communication of risk. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. . Thousand Oaks, California: SAG Sage.

King, A. J. (2015). Visual messaging and risk communication. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Session 9: Biases in Risk Perception (Oct 17)

Meyer, R, and Kunreuther, H. (2017). *The ostrich paradox: Why we underprepare for disasters*. Philadelphia, PA: Wharton Digital.

Section 10: The Role of Media (Oct 24)

Priest, S. (2015). Media portrayal of risk: The social production of news. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. 208-215). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (Chapter 14)

Nisbet, M. C. (2015). Framing, the media, and risk communication in policy debates. Visual messaging and risk communication. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.),

The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication (pp. 216-227). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (Chapter 15)

So, J. and Nabi, R. (2013). Reduction of perceived social distance as an explanation for media's influence on personal risk perceptions: A test of the risk convergence model. *Human Communication Research*, 39, 317-388. doi: 10.1111/hcre.12005

Session 11: Current Problems Facing Risk Communication: The Weather Example (Oct 31)

Read these first:

Wang, A.B., Wootson, C. R., and O'Keefe, E. (2017, Aug 28). As Harvey submerges Houston, local officials defend their calls not to evacuate. *The Washington Post* Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/08/27/harvey-is-causing-epic-catastrophic-flooding-in-houston-why-wasnt-the-city-evacuated/?utm_term=.fb3997faacb2

Jeffries, S. (2017). What Houston's mayor got right about handling disasters (and why Florida should pay attention). *INC*. Retrieved from: <https://www.inc.com/sam-jefferies/what-houstons-mayor-got-right-about-handling-disas.html>

Cochrane, E. and Fernandez, M. (2017, Sept 8). Two hurricanes in two weeks bring two very different reactions. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/08/us/irma-harvey-evacuations.html>

Then read these:

From:

Silver, N. (2012). *The signal and the noise: Why so many predictions fail – but some don't*. New York, NY: Penguin Books. Read Chapter 4: For years you've been telling us that rain is green.

Silver, N. (2017, Sep. 21). The media has a probability problem. *FiveThirtyEight*. Retrieved from: https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-media-has-a-probability-problem/amp/?_twitter_impression=true

Session 12: Looking Toward the Future of Risk Communication (Nov 7)

Rains, S. A., Brunner, S. R., and Oman, K. (2015). Social media and risk communication. In Cho, H., Reimer, T., and McComas, K. A. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Risk Communication* (pp. 228-240). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (Chapter 16)

Fagerlin, A., Ubel, P. A., Smith, D. M., and Zikmund-Fisher, B. J. (2007). Making numbers matter: Present and future research in risk communication. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 31, S47-S56. doi: 10.5993/ajhb.31.s1.7

Session 13: Summarizing risk communication (Nov 14)

Nov 21 – Thanksgiving break, no class

Session 14: Paper presentations (last day of class) (Nov. 28). Papers due today.

LSU Commitment to Community

Louisiana State University is an interactive community in which students, faculty, and staff together strive to pursue truth, advance learning, and uphold the highest standards of performance in an academic and social environment. It is a community that fosters individual development and the creation of bonds that transcend the time spent within its gates. To demonstrate my pride in LSU, as a member of its community, I will:

- Accept responsibility for my actions;
- Hold myself and others to the highest standards of academic, personal, and social integrity;
- Practice justice, equality, and compassion in human relations;
- Respect the dignity of all persons and accept individual differences;
- Respect the environment and the rights and property of others and the University;
- Contribute positively to the life of the campus and surrounding community; and
- Use my LSU experience to be an active citizen in an international and interdependent world.

The continued success of LSU depends on the faithful commitment by each community member to these, our basic principles.