

Risk Communication: COM 6815 – 6815

Fall 2025

(Syllabus subject to change based on the best interests of students' learning in the course)

Basic Information

Instructor: Haoran “Chris” Chu

Email: chu.h@ufl.edu (Preferred method of communication. Please include COM6815 in the subject line.)

Office Phone Number: 352-294-9115

Class Periods: 1084 Weimer, Monday, 9-11, 1:55 - 4:55 pm

Office Hours: Monday 12:00 pm – 1:45 pm or by appointment, 3052 Weimer or virtually

Course Descriptions

This graduate seminar examines theory and research related to the communication of health, environmental, technological, agricultural, and geological risks. It looks at risk communication from multiple perspectives, including psychological, social, and cultural. The course will emphasize understanding, critiquing, and applying theories of risk communication. It encourages you to think critically about risk communication as a dynamic process. After taking this course, students should be familiar with the major theories related to risk communication and have an appreciation for how these theories relate to the practice of risk communication.

LEARNING MATERIALS

- No text is required. However, you are expected to read all assigned readings, including any that are added later in the semester and those suggested by your fellow students.
- Optional readings:
 - Cho, H., Reimer, T., & McComas, K. A. (Eds.). (2014). *The Sage handbook of risk communication*. SAGE Publications.
- Readings for each week will be made available on Canvas or emailed to you, on occasion.
- For your own research and interest, check out electronic resources in risk communication, such as <http://www.culturalcognition.net/>, which will be useful for your research projects as well as online/in-person discussion. A compilation of electronic resources on risk communication is available at <https://www.sra.org/specialty-groups/risk-communication/research/>. You are encouraged to browse through journals such as Risk Analysis and Journal of Risk Research.

Please Note:

- This syllabus and other course content are subject to change based on the best interest of student learning. Changes will be announced on Canvas and via email. It is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** to check your UF email regularly.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Learning Objective	Learning Outcomes
To develop a good understanding of different areas of risk communication research.	• Students will be able to explain how key theories in risk communication are developed and refined. • This learning outcome will be assessed in response papers and in-class discussions.
To critically evaluate and analyze key risk communication theories and their applications in different research and practical contexts.	• Students will be able to evaluate key risk communication theories regarding their scope, logical consistency, parsimony, utility, and testability. • This learning outcome will be assessed with response papers and in-class discussions.
To apply risk communication theories to analyze real-world risk communication scenarios.	• Students will be able to identify, describe, and explain what risk communication theories could be applied to analyze several case studies and propose appropriate communication strategies. • This learning outcome will be assessed with a case study presentation, discussion moderation, and research paper.

GRADING CRITERIA

NOTE: Please understand that **points and percentages are different units**. The total points for this course is 1,000, and the total percentage is 100%. Therefore, 10 points are equal to 1 percent. All the following grading criteria (including extra credit) are based on the point system (1,000 points). All assignment due dates can be found in the course schedule attached to this syllabus.

- **Class Participation** (100 points/10 percent)
 - Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings for that day. You may respond to questions posed by me and other students in their response papers and presentations or ask questions related to the readings. Comments on the theories and specific research articles are also encouraged. You are expected to participate in the discussions during your presentation week and the weeks in which you have submitted a response paper.
- **Response Paper** (250 points/25 percent)
 - In keeping with the seminar design, you will be asked to read a considerable amount of original or in-depth materials before each class. To facilitate this, you will write short response papers (2 double-spaced pages max.), raising questions or issues for discussion or responding to questions I may pose. There is no need to cite core readings, but external

references should be properly cited. Response papers should not simply summarize the readings but reflect your own thinking based on them. Please note that you need to read the readings even if you are not submitting a response paper.

- Starting week 3, these short papers are due by **8 pm via Canvas the Friday** before the relevant class. You may choose any week during weeks 3-13 to submit **five response papers** in total. However, please do not submit a response paper during the weeks when you are doing the research presentation.
- Each response paper is worth 50 points and will be graded based on merit.
- **Discussion Leader** (150 points/15 percent)
 - From week 3 to 15, At least once during the semester, you will be responsible for leading the discussion. This is not a formal presentation; instead, your job will be to highlight important issues in the readings and help provide a structure for considering key questions for the week's topic. When you are leading the discussion, please assume that your classmates have done the reading – a brief reminder about the main points or methods used in the articles is appropriate, but an extended summary is not. Instead, your job is to help us have a conversation that brings out important issues raised by the readings.
 - As a discussion leader, you will need to read all the readings assigned for the week. You will present the core arguments and findings made in the additional articles to the class and solicit comments and questions from the class regarding these articles.
 - Please feel free to meet with me the week before you are scheduled to be a discussion leader if you have questions or would like to discuss a strategy for leading the discussion. If you have an additional article that you would like to recommend to the class, or if you would like to suggest switching one of the required articles with one of the additional articles, please let me know at least a week in advance of the class.
 - You will need to submit a discussion outline to me by **12:00 pm on the day of the class**. (Earlier submission is fine!) If you are paired with a partner for your discussion-leading day, you can submit one outline for both of you.
 - You will sign up for the discussion week/topic during the week 1 class based on your interests. I will do my best to assign everyone to a topic of their choice. Starting week 2, we will have one to two students leading the discussion, depending on the class size.
- **Discussion Questions** (150 points/15 percent)
 - From week 3 to week 15, you should come up with three (or more) discussion questions. These questions should be posted on the corresponding discussion board on Canvas no later than **8 pm the Friday** before class. There is no need to submit the discussion questions if you are leading the discussion or writing a response paper.
 - A good discussion question provides a springboard for exploring the issues raised in the articles. For example, are there common themes that run through the readings? Are there differences highlighted by alternative theories or approaches? Other topics for good discussion questions might include critiques of the studies, real-world applications, and links to previous readings or topics.
 - Straightforward clarification questions (e.g., what a technical term means, how to interpret a statistical analysis) are not appropriate discussion questions, but please feel free to ask those kinds of questions in class.
- **Research Project** (350 points/35 percent)

- Option 1 – Research Paper (PhD or MS/MA students): This option will give you an opportunity to develop a full research paper that you should aim to submit to an academic conference. Possible topics could include a content analysis of media coverage of a particular risk issue, an experiment that examines specific mechanisms that shape individuals' risk perceptions and behaviors, or a survey that evaluates attitudes toward and intentions to perform a specific risk-reducing behavior.
- Option 2 – Case Study (MS/MA students): This option will give you an opportunity to examine a risk communication situation of your choosing in depth. To investigate your situation, you will need to access significant literature related to your topic so that you can adequately describe the issue. You will be expected to find both popular and scientific sources to describe the risk. The final product will be a paper that describes the case, analyzes it from a theoretical point of view, and offers recommendations based on your research.
- You will present your research proposal or case study to the class during the last week of class. You will make a 15-to-20-minute presentation about your research paper or case study, followed by a short Q&A session. Feedback will be provided for your paper revision before final submission. The style of the presentation will be similar to conference presentations.
- Detailed requirements for the research project will be posted on Canvas.

COURSE GRADING SCALE AND PERCENTAGES

Grading Items	Points	Percentage Allocation
Class Participation	100	10%
Discussion Leader	150	15%
Discussion Questions	150	15%
Response Papers	250	25%
Research Paper/Case Study	350	35%
Total point	1,000	100%

Letter Grades:

93.5-100%	A	83.5-87%	B	73.5-77%	C	63.5-67%	D
90-93.4%	A-	80-83.4%	B-	70-73.4%	C-	60-63.4%	D-
87.1-89.9%	B+	77.1-79.9%	C+	67.1-69.9%	D+	0-59.9%	E

LATE/MISSED SUBMISSION

Late submissions, in general, will not be accepted. Discuss with me in advance if you are not able to submit an assignment on time due to exceptional reasons.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR GRADES

I am more than happy to talk with you about your grade and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your graded work. That said, I require a 24-hour “cool off” period. We will not discuss your grade until we both have time gather our thoughts and have a productive conversation. After the initial 24 hours, students have

one week to meet with the instructor to discuss the grade. If the student does not meet with the instructor **within a week**, then the instructor considers the matter closed. All discussions regarding grades are conducted in person, in my office.

EFFORT VS. EXCELLENCE

You do not receive a grade for how hard you worked; you only receive it on the final product. Instructor grades your work on the degree of excellence it demonstrates. Make no mistake about the relationship between the two, as hard work often results in solid evaluations. That said, just because you spent “10 hours in the library” before a test or a group project doesn’t guarantee you a good grade. You have to study properly, address assignment requirements, and the like in order to ensure a solid grade. I will help out in every way I can along the way and ALWAYS want you to do well. Don’t hesitate for a second to reach out to me (just don’t do it at the last second!).

UNIVERSITY HONESTY POLICY

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conducthonor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

COURSE EVALUATION

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

STUDENTS REQUIRING ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

Materials in this course—unless otherwise indicated—are protected by United States copyright law [Title 17, U.S. Code]. Materials are presented in an educational context for personal use and study and should not be shared, distributed, or sold in print—or digitally—outside the course without permission. Students may not record, reproduce, screenshot, photograph, or distribute any video, audio, or visual content from this course. This restriction includes but is not limited to live discussions, discussion boards, posted course materials, course evaluation form, visual materials that accompany lectures/discussions, such as slides and whiteboard notes, etc.

VIDEO RECORDING

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal

or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

MISCELLANEOUS

- The instructor reserves the right to make any changes to the syllabus, schedule, assignments, readings, forms, lecture topics, assessments, and any other course content if deemed necessary to facilitate classroom management and to achieve the learning objectives for the course. Students are responsible to stay aware of these changes.
- Only students enrolled in this course may attend (and receive credit for) this class.
- I take plagiarism very seriously. Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an “E” for the course and disciplinary action. Do not submit the same work to more than one class. Do not adapt work from another class for this class. Do not adapt someone else’s work and submit it as your own. This course requires original work, created at this time, for this purpose.

COURSE SCHEDULE

*This is a *tentative* schedule.

Class Date	Topics
Week 1	
8/25	Course introduction & syllabus
Week 2	
9/1	<i>No class – Labor Day</i>
Week 3	
9/8	The field of risk communication
Week 4	
9/15	Foundational risk research
Week 5	
9/22	Risk literacy & numeracy
Week 6	
9/29	Prospect theory, framing, & nudging
Week 7	
10/6	Motivated reasoning and optimistic bias
Week 8	
10/13	Psychological distance and construal level
Week 9	
10/20	Emotion & affect
Week 10	
10/27	Trust & credibility

Week 11	
11/3	Risk, culture, and society
Week 12	
11/10	Media effects and risk
Week 13	
11/17	Narrative Persuasion
Week 14	
11/24	<i>No Class - Thanksgiving Week</i>
Week 15	
12/1	Final Project Presentation
Final Exam Week	
12/8	<i>There is no final exam for this course</i>