



**SYLLABUS: CMM 389E: Risk and Crisis Communication in the EU
Summer, 2010, VESALIUS COLLEGE**

Number of Credits: 6 ECTS

Instructor: David Zaruk
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Course Time: Mondays and Wednesdays 9h00-13h00

Office Hours: After classes on indication

Textbook: Personal book on risk in finalization, risk training site set up from an EU project (VECO was a major partner): www.communicate-cooperate.eu and materials placed on course website [*Handouts of academic papers, website materials, risk campaign documents*]

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Since Ulrich Beck's seminal book in 1992, Risk Society, we have seen the growth of risk communication and crisis preparedness in EU policy debates and public concerns. Fear of catastrophe or disaster, man-made or natural, has become a principle subject of concern in today's 24 hour media, creating a market for preparedness for everything from floods and droughts to climate change adaptation to flu pandemics to nuclear meltdowns to chemical or alimentary contamination. Communicators, from industry lobbyists to NGO campaigners, have adopted risk strategies into their communication plans, leading policy makers to adapt their communication strategies to fit the context of emerging issues and public perceptions. When a crisis strikes, there is a flurry of positions and action plans, but little time for analysis of the risks or threats. Some recent examples include the EU and WHO's H1N1 flu pandemic preparations, the 2008 financial meltdown, the series of global floods and landslides in 2009, as well as food contamination scares from the Belgian dioxin scandal to GMOs and BSE (mad-cow disease).

The course intends to analyse:

- how risks emerge – their perception, communication and management
- how the public perceives and responds to risks and crises
- how the media appetite for risks and crises affects public perception
- how different stakeholders use the tools available to communicate on risks
- how crises emerge, the psychology and the responsibilities in crisis communication
- how EU policy tools have emerged to manage our risk/crisis preoccupation

COURSE OBJECTIVES & SKILLS PROGRESSION

The main objective of this course is to open the students' eyes, so that when they encounter risk or crisis communications techniques, they can assess it with experience.

The Communications Curriculum Committee has created a list of specific skills for Communication majors that must be developed in 300-level, required courses. From this list, CMM 389E promotes the skills that are listed below:

- enhanced writing skills
- reinforced research skills
- critical thinking
- extended presentation skills with PowerPoint
- ability to assess various communications models for effectiveness while factoring in the increasingly global perspective.

Several skills particular to this course will be necessary to develop.

Listening and note taking: in spite of the number of on-line materials and course texts to be read as part of the required reading, a sizeable amount of information will be given through the lecture format.

Research: Papers to be handed in require high-quality research. Though general guidelines are provided, the papers should demonstrate that students know how to make use of the relevant information they have found and the paper must prove that a significant number and variety of sources have been consulted.

Critical Thinking: The ability to understand and appreciate theories in their social and political context will be tested. Students are expected to explore issues in depth using their critical skills and qualify (and even challenge) some of the accepted assumptions. The professor expects to be challenged.

Collaboration: The participation mark for this course is quite high as students will be expected to participate on the course website in discussion forums, address issues and take initiatives on projects and challenges. There will be some teamwork expected and the course website will provide the means for that.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The college expects students and faculty to be responsible members of the academic community. Students' conduct must be consistent with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- The use of illicit aids during an examination
- Giving or receiving illicit aid in an examination
- Copying from another student's examination, term paper, homework, lab report, etc., or letting another student copy work
- Using the exact words, data, or ideas of another without properly acknowledging their source

Your writing is to be your own, except for duly acknowledged references. Plagiarism makes another person's fact, idea, opinion, line of argument, or wording appear as you own, whether you copy it (use the exact words), paraphrase it (put it into your own words), summarize it, or adopt a line of argument. Presenting the same work in more than one course without the advanced agreement of both professors and without referencing the previous work is also considered as plagiarism.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

Participation

Attendance and active participation is vital to the student's progress. Students are expected to attend classes on time and take notes. Thus, the instructor reserves the right to reduce the student's grade for absences. Participation means attending class, actively contributing to class discussions and turning assignments in on time. More than three unexcused absences will lead to an incremental drop in your grade for the class (i.e., an "A" will become an "A-", an "A-" will become a "B+", etc.) Students who are absent are responsible for finding out what was covered in class, and are still expected to get any assignments in on time.

Participation also includes involvement on the discussions generated on a course website to be created. They will be expected to take initiatives and encourage discussions and idea-sharing in the website forums.

Exams

The mid-term and final exams will cover both lecture notes and assigned readings. The students will also be expected to know the issues concerning their chosen companies and could have a question focused on that.

Risk Assessment

The student will select a risk or crisis situation and analyse it within the parameters of the course. The analysis will be compiled in a report (minimum 4000 words double-spaced) submitted by the fifth week. The report implies a significant amount of research into the events, the stakeholders involved, the policy process and the publics involved. Much of the background work will be done during the course as the student is expected to follow the analyses of the risk theories and assess how it applies to his or her risk situation. A certain amount of time is dedicated in each class to following the particular risk situation.

Stakeholder Representation (Role-Playing)

Over the course, several hypothetical risks / crises will be developed – the students will be assigned a stakeholder position and they will have to represent this stakeholder in different risk-management situations (policy, media, public arenas).

The final grade

based on the following:

Risk Assessment (40h)	25%
Stakeholder Representation	15%
Mid-Term Exam (15 hours)	15%
Final Exam (25 hours)	25%
Participation (60 hours) (this includes web collaboration)	20%

The grade breakdown is:

A	85 and above
A-	81
B+	77
B	73
B-	69
C+	66
C	62
C-	58
D+	54
D	50
F	anything below 50/100

COURSE CALENDAR

1. Risks, fears, outrage, crises and disasters – definitions and concepts
2. Risk theories: Overview of works of Beck, Renn, Sandman, Slovic, Loftsted, Furedi
3. Common threads – an analysis of a series of crises and what they share in common
4. How stakeholders use risks and crises (focus on the climate change debate)
5. Crisis preparedness, scenario building and developing communication strategies
6. Risk mongering: how the media plays with risk fears and is played by others
7. Trust and narrative structure: the two keys to risk and crisis management
8. The role of science and technology in risks and crises: risk assessments
9. Emerging technological risks and the role of science communications
10. Policy tools on risk: Engagement and participatory decision-making
11. Policy tools on risk: Precautionary Principle and ALARA
12. Scenario simulation exercise (created by the EU – DG Environment)

Case studies

- Nuclear risk management and crisis communication
- H1N1, Avian flu and Sars: informing the public and controlling the pandemic and panic
- Natural disasters: floods, droughts and earthquakes – preparation and implementation
- 2008 financial meltdown – how markets responded to the perceived economic collapse
- Chemicals, pesticides and the anticipated cancer epidemic
- Global warming (apocalyptic planning and narrative framing)
- Food chain contamination (GMOs, food additives, BSE)
- Obesity and lifestyle risks (Alcohol and Tobacco)
- Synthetic biology (playing God or the industrialization of biology?)
- Nanotechnology and the need to control scientific research

Students will be expected to focus on a particular risk issue or crisis situation, using the materials from the course to assess how well the event was / is managed and communicated as well as lessons learned for future crises.