Proposal for a New Graduate Course

Department: Department of Communication
Graduate Program: Master of Arts in Communication
Course Number & Title: COMM 549: Risk Communication
Total hours/week: 03
Number of Credits: Lectures: 03, Lab: 00

Will this course be cross-listed with an undergraduate or other graduate course? □ YES  X NO

If yes, please complete an attach to this proposal a Permission to Cross-List a Graduate Course form.

Course will first be offered: Spring 2012

Catalog description (Please limit to 50 words):
This course examines key concepts for risk communication, including characterizing and managing issues, disseminating information, and communicating effectively in crisis situations.

Prerequisites (or other restrictions):
N/A

Rationale/Justification for course (consider the following issues):
The course objectives include: to define and identify risk situations, to describe the key elements of risk communication situations, to understand the risk communication process/cycle, to contextualize the role of crisis communications within the risk communication framework, to explain human behavioral response to different risk communication messages, to illustrate successful risk communication approaches for issues management and crisis/emergency risk communication, and to prepare key messages and outline communications strategy/plan for various risk situations.

This course has been taught as a special topics course and successfully served as an elective course for our students. Through student feedback and review of program electives, it was determined that this course would be best offered as a recurring elective course rather than a special topics seminar.

Are other departments affected by this course? □ YES  X NO

Is this course part of a joint program? □ YES  X NO
If yes, at what institution?

Method of teaching: Lectures, discussion, and individual and group exercises are used to present risk communication literature and engage students in the practical application of risk communication concepts and principles. Guest speakers and case studies will reinforce key tenets of successful risk communication.

If more space is needed for any section, please attach additional sheets to this form.

November 2007
Expected changes

a. Address potential enrollment pattern shifts in the Department or University-wide as it relates to the offering of this course.

This will be one elective course among several such courses in the department’s graduate program. No meaningful enrollment shift is anticipated.

b. Address potential shifts in staffing of the department as it relates to the offering of this course.

Several faculty colleagues in the department are qualified to teach this course. The course previously has been offered under a seminar number, with no challenge where departmental staffing is concerned.

Requirements for additional resources made necessary by this course. (Note: course requiring additional resources will need special justification.)

a. Staff

None. Multiple graduate faculty members in the Department of Communication are qualified to teach this course.

b. Budget

None. The department has the resources needed to support this course.

c. Library

None. The extant communication library budget provides sufficient support for the necessary serials and monographs relevant to this course.

Attach course syllabus, reading list, or any additional documentation that can help the committee evaluate this proposal. A syllabus is mandatory.

If more space is needed for any section, please attach additional sheets to this form.
Signature of Program Director:
Signature of Department Chair:
Additional Chair's Signature*:
Signature of Schools' Dean:
Additional Schools' Dean Signature*:
Signature of the Provost:
Signature of Budget Director**:

*For interdisciplinary courses.

**Business Affairs Office

Return form to the Graduate School Office for Further Processing

Signature of Chair of the Faculty Committee on Graduate and Continuing Education

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Date: 2/23/2010
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Date: 2/24/2010
Date: 3/24/2010

If more space is needed for any section, please attach additional sheets to this form.

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COMM 549: Risk Communication  
Spring 2012  
Class Location: NORT 104

Instructor: Dr. Amanda Ruth-McSwain  
Main Office: 7 College Way, Room 301  
Phone: 953.5783  
North Office: Bldg. B, Suite 102  
Phone: 760.5879  
E-mail: ruthmcswaina@cofc.edu

Office Hours:  
T•TH from 1:30 p.m. until 3:00 p.m.  
(Downtown)  
T from 4:00 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. (North)  
and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The term “risk communication” refers to a body of knowledge and a set of practical skills that can be used by professional communicators in characterizing and managing issues, disseminating information, and communicating effectively in crisis or emergency situations. Principles of risk communication are derived from social science research, psychological and communication theory, and experience of professionals who have addressed real-world risk communication issues. This course examines key concepts of risk communication, investigates risk communication theories and approaches as well as implements practical applications in learning about communicating risk situations.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
This graduate seminar will examine concepts related to the communication of environmental, agricultural, health, nutritional, terrorist and related risk situations. In using cases to illustrate risk communication scenarios and theory, this course will emphasize understanding, applying, and developing risk communication concepts and strategies. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define and identify risk situations.
2. Describe the key elements of risk communication situations.
3. Outline the risk communication process/cycle.
4. Highlight the role of crisis communications within the risk communication framework.
5. Explain normal human behavioral response to different risk communication messages, including characteristics of risk perception.
6. Illustrate successful risk communication approaches for issues management and crisis/emergency risk communication.
7. Prepare key messages and outline communications strategy/plan for various risk situations.
8. Demonstrate successful strategies for media relations during risk/crisis situations.

COURSE INSTRUCTION AND EXPECTATIONS
Lectures, discussions, and individual and group exercises are used to present risk communication literature and engage students in the practical application of risk communication concepts and principles. Guest speakers, case studies, and group scenarios will reinforce key tenets of successful risk communication and allow students to learn from simulated experience.

Course grades will be assigned on the basis of the following three criteria:

- Class participation
- Completion and quality of assignments
- Examination performance
COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Class participation 25 points
Project #1 (Class facilitator) 50 points
Project #2 (Reflection Papers) 180 points
Project #3 (Disaster Critique) 100 points
Project #4 (Mental Models Research) 100 points
Project #5 (Risk Communication Plan) 150 points
Midterm Exam 50 points
Final Exam 50 points

Class participation – As with most graduate seminar classes, you will be asked to read a substantial amount of material before class so you can discuss the material during class. Throughout the course, you will be expected to contribute your experiences, opinions, and questions to the discussions. There will be in-class participation exercises that will apply concepts from the assigned readings. In most situations, if you do not read, you will not be able to contribute to the discussion and/or complete the participation exercises. Be warned ... all assigned readings (text and supplemental) may appear on the exams.

Project #1 – During the first week of class, you (and your partner) will choose one of the scheduled classes to facilitate. As a class facilitator, you are required to have read, understand, and lead class discussion on the assigned readings for that class. Responsibilities of the class facilitator include: reading assigned materials, preparing discussion questions to facilitate discussion, providing supplemental materials and examples that reinforce the concepts presented in the assigned readings, preparing participation activities to apply the concepts presented in the assigned readings, and providing three examination questions to the instructor based on the material presented during the class.

Project #2 – Reflection papers will help you to synthesize and analyze the weekly course readings. Each week, you will submit a one-page paper that articulates your thoughts on the week's readings. The paper will be due every week by 8:00 a.m. on the Tuesday of class. The reflection papers are to be emailed to ruthmcswain@cofc.edu as an MSWord attachment. Reflection papers will include your insight, opinions, questions, experiences, applications, and understanding of the readings. It should be apparent in your reflection paper how the material relates to our discussion on risk communication. Each reflection paper is worth 15 points and will be graded on the effort and thought demonstrated throughout the document.

Project #3 – In following current events throughout the semester, you will be exposed to various real-world risk/crisis events. The disaster critique assignment will require you to research one of those current risk/crisis situations by monitoring, documenting, and analyzing the situation from commencement to completion. Through a brief (5-page) disaster critique paper, you will 1) define and describe the risk situation including an explanation of the internal and external stakeholders involved, 2) describe the risk/crisis lifecycle of the situation, 3) critique the communication (i.e., stakeholder correspondence, media relations strategies, etc.) surrounding the risk/crisis situation using theoretical support for your critique, and 4) present gathered evidence (newspaper clippings, Internet materials, televised newscasts, etc.) of the risk/crisis situation. An informal presentation to the class of your critique is included in the grade for this assignment.

Project #4 – This group project will follow the mental models approach in conducting research on a current risk issue. Self-selected groups will be assigned a risk topic of investigation. After conducting
secondary research to determine the expert model for the issue, teams will conduct interviews to determine the public model for the issue. Following interviews and ensuing surveys, each group will submit results of their research investigation as well as research-based recommendations for communicating the risk.

Project #5 – This project can be completed in an individual or group situation (3 group members maximum). The risk communication plan/campaign consists of three phases. In the beginning of the semester, you will choose an issue/company. This company will be a company in which information is readily available; this can also be a company where you currently work (if applicable). The first phase of the project is to conduct background research on the company in order to identify potential risk situations that could result in crisis for the company. Following this research, the team will present their research through a brief company backgrounder/SWOT analysis. The second phase of the project will include a risk/crisis communication plan that can be implemented if and when any of the identified risk/crisis situations arise. The communications plan must emphasize media relations strategies including message maps and other communications material, as well as grassroots communication with internal and external stakeholder audiences. Examples of risk/crisis communication plans can be found at the following web sites:
http://php.louisville.edu/advancement/ocm/crisis_comm/, http://www.napa.ufl.edu/crisis.htm,
http://www.gram.edu/Departments/Public%20Relations/crisis.htm,
The final phase of the project will include a presentation of your risk communication plan to the class.

Midterm and Final Exams – At the mid-point and end of the semester, you will be tested on your comprehension and ability to apply the concepts presented through class discussion and out-of-class readings throughout the semester.

GRADING
Course grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90 to 100 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87 to 89.99 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80 to 86.99 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77 to 79.99 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70 to 76.99 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 70 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Incomplete (for extreme cases only)</td>
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COURSE MATERIALS


Required: Course reading list in which students will be expected to locate and retrieve the journal articles, web articles, and book passages listed. Course reading list is available on WebCT.

Supplemental: In addition to the required readings listed on the course reading list below, there are supplemental materials that may provide valuable information for students throughout the semester.
Electronic resources in risk communication, such as RiskWorld.com (http://www.riskworld.com) and FoodRisk.org (http://www.foodrisk.org), which will be useful for research projects as well as for class discussion.

Compilation of electronic resources in risk communication is also available at http://www.sra.org/rcsg/rcsgresources.html.

Risk related journals, such as Risk Analysis, and Risk: Health, Safety & Environment (http://www.fplc.edu/RISK/rskarts/htm).

Risk Communication listserv (instructions available at http://www.sra.org/rcsg), which provides an outlet to ask questions and generate ideas.


ATTENDANCE
Success in this course is highly dependant on attendance and class participation. Therefore, students are required to attend class and to be in class on time. Please do not enter the classroom if you are more than 15 minutes late. Only documented doctor’s excuses or CofC-approved activities will be excused. These attendance guidelines are extremely important for the successful completion of this course.

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY
There will be no make up of presentations, assignments, or in-class activities. No late work will be accepted without advanced notice and arrangements. Work that is turned in after the due date will be penalized one letter grade each day it is late thereafter.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT
Educators and learners are professionals guided by specific values and engaged in particular behaviors. These values and behaviors include respect, cooperation, active participation, intellectual inquiry, punctuality, and regular attendance. In addition to the knowledge and skills you attain throughout this course, you will be evaluated on your growth as a professional communicator. Professional characteristics on which you will be judged include punctuality, attendance, collegial attitude, and participation. Because this course relies extensively on discussion and class interaction, attendance and participation is crucial to your success. In addition, as professionals you are expected to be respectful of the work environment, which includes turning off all beepers, pagers, cell phones before entering the classroom.

HONOR CODE
As professionals, you are to be familiar with the policies set forth in the College of Charleston Graduate Student Handbook. Should I suspect that these policies have been broken in any way, I will immediately turn to the College Honors Board. If you are caught cheating (plagiarism, dishonorable testing, etc.) you will receive a zero on the assignment. If you are caught on a repeated offense, you will fail the course.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS
Any student eligible for and needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability is requested to speak with Dr. Ruth during the first two weeks of class. Please recognize that I cannot accommodate you if you do not notify me in advance.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week #1 (January 13)  
Class Introduction  
*Schedule Project #1 - Class Facilitation*

Week #2 (January 20)  
Introduction to Risk Communication

Week #3 (January 27)  
Approaches to Risk Communication

Week #4 (February 3)  
Risk Communication: Theory

Week #5 (February 10)  
Risk Communication: Ethics

Week #6 (February 17)  
Risk Communication: Constraints/Perceptions

Week #7 (February 24)  
Risk Communication: Perceptions & Behaviors

Week #8 (March 3)  
*Spring Break*

Week #9 (March 10)  
Risk Mental Models  
*Midterm Exam*

Week #10 (March 17)  
Risk Communication: Principles

Week #11 (March 24)  
Strategies for Risk Communication

Week #12 (March 31)  
Risk Communication Plans

Week #13 (April 7)  
Risk Communication Plans  
*Project #3 - Disaster Critiques Due*

Week #14 (April 14)  
Media Coverage of Risk

Week #15 (April 21)  
Risk Media Relations  
*Project #4 - Mental Models Research Due*

Week #16 (April 28)  
Risk Communication Plan Consultations  
Course Review and Wrap-Up

Final Week of Semester  
*Project #5 - Risk Communication Plans Due* (submit via email)

Final Exam Date  
*Final Examination*

**This is a tentative syllabus; modifications may be made by the instructor and will be announced in class.**