COMM 3115: Communicating Science, Health, Environment

University of Utah, Fall 2012
Department of Communication
LNCO, Room 1100; Tuesday/Thursday 9:10-10:30 a.m.

Professor: Dr. Robin E. Jensen
Office Number: LNCO 2619
Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 11-12, and by appointment
E-mail: r.e.jensen@utah.edu

Course Description

Communication plays a fundamental role in public perception of science, health, and the environment. This class provides students with an overview of how these topics tend to be communicated in contexts ranging from the mass media to public hearings to patient-provider interactions. Students will be encouraged to break down the symbolic practices that emerge in such communication and to assess their associated consequences in terms of lay beliefs about issues such as climate change, pandemics, addiction, and genetics. Emphasis will be placed on understanding what research describes as best practices in terms of persuasively and accurately communicating about science, health, and the environment to various audiences.

Course Goals

By the end of this class, students will be able to:

- **Think critically** about how issues related to science, health, and the environment have been communicated to various publics
- Identify tactics that one might employ to **persuasively communicate issues** of science, health, and the environment to a variety of different audiences
- **Delineate key ethical quandaries** that must be considered when communicating to various publics about science, health, and the environment
- Understand and **report on central lines of research** related to science, health, and the environment
- **Identify scholars with whom they would like to study and careers they might pursue** if they were to receive an undergraduate or advanced degree in the study of communication about science, health, and the environment
- **Differentiate among types of methodologies** that are commonly used in research on communication about science, health, and the environment

Course Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>35%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Exam 1 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from August 21 to September 18.
Exam 2 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from September 20 to October 30.

Exam 3
Exam 3 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from November 1 to December 6.

Course Policies

Attendance on Test Days: By enrolling for this class, you have made a commitment to taking the tests on the days that they are set to be administered (September 18, October 30, and December 6). Taking that commitment seriously will save you time, energy, and face.

*In the event of an EXTREME, unavoidable emergency, a school-sponsored activity, or a religious holiday that overlaps with a test date, it may be possible to reschedule a test if you turn in an adequate packet of proof and justification to me by the class period before the original test date (or the class period after if the emergency occurred on the day of the test). A proof and justification packet will include:

(1) adequate written proof of your situation,
(2) evidence that you contacted me immediately when your situation arose, and
(3) a two to three page paper making a convincing argument about why you should be allowed to take the test at a different time. This paper should be well-written and persuasively attest that you missed the test through no fault of your own because you were faced with an unavoidable emergency, a school-sponsored activity, or a religious holiday that overlapped with a test date.

Class Attendance: Students are expected to be in class for all class meetings, but attendance is not formally recorded (except on test days). If a student misses a lecture, s/he is responsible for making up the missed material. Lecture material is not repeated and lecture notes are not available from the professor. Do not email the professor to ask if you missed something. It is the responsibility of the absent student to learn, from their classmates, what has transpired in lecture.

Electronics/Media Policy: To foster an engaged and focused classroom environment, students are asked to turn off all phones, Blackberries, etc. during class. Laptop computers, iPads, and the like should be used for taking notes rather than e-mailing or searching the web. Violation of this policy will result in a final grade deduction or, in extreme cases, elimination from the course.

Disability Accommodation Policy: Any student who, because of disability, may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact the professor immediately so that the necessary accommodations can be made. University’s ADA policy: http://disability.utah.edu/
Accommodation Policy: No content accommodations will be available for this class. Please review the syllabus, readings, assignments, and materials to be sure that this is a course you wish to take. Details on the university’s accommodation policy are available at this link: http://www.admin.utah.edu/facdev/pdf/accommodations-policy.pdf

University and Federal Policies Related to:
Academic honesty: http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html
Attendance: http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/attend.php
Grade Disputes: http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html
Incompletes: http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/incomplete.php
Student Privacy: http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/ferpa.php
Withdrawals: http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/withdrawal.php

Course Materials

The course articles are available via Marriott Library e-reserves. To access the e-reserves list, go to the J. Willard Marriott Library home page at http://www.lib.utah.edu/. On the left hand side of the page, click on “Course Reserves.” Search for COMM 3115 or the instructor’s name, “Robin Jensen,” and the articles will be available for you to click on and access.

Course Grading

COMM 3115 modifies the typical plus/minus system in two key ways: (1) there is no A+ or A- because the university does not recognize an A+ as uniquely different from an A (thus making the A- problematic), and (2) the plus/minus system is designed to conform to the full letter grade system with the following cut-offs: A (90-100), B (80-89), C (70-79), D (60-69), and F (59 and below). The plus/minus system implemented in this course has the same basic endpoints (i.e., B grades range from 80 to 89, C grades range from 70 to 79), but adds a traditional 3-4-3 plus/minus hierarchical scheme. For example, a B- is the first 3 percentage points (80, 81, 82), a B is the middle 4 percentage points (83, 84, 85, 86), and a B+ is the final 3 percentage points (87, 88, 89) (i.e., a 3-4-3 scheme).

Grade Calculation: One's course grade will be determined by the (weighted) average of the grades on the course assignments. Each assignment will receive a percentage (and a letter grade to help students interpret their score), with numerical equivalents as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Grade</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90% and up</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87% and up</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83% and up</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% and up</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77% and up</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73% and up</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
70% and up  C-
67% and up  D+
63% and up  D
60% and up  D-
59% and below  F*

*Students that score lower than a 55% on a test will be assigned a grade of 55% (so that one low grade cannot jeopardize their chances of passing). However, students who cheat, fail to show up for the test, or otherwise exhibit poor behavior will receive a zero (00%).

A student who received an 83% (B) on the first test, a 68% (D+) on the second test, and a 94% (A) on the third test would have a course average of 81.79% (B-).

\[
\text{(test 1} \times \text{test 1 weight}) + (\text{test 2} \times \text{test 2 weight}) + (\text{test 3} \times \text{test 3 weight})
\]

\[
(83 \times .33) + (68 \times .33) + (94 \times .34) = 81.79\%
\]

To convert the course average into a course grade, apply the final percentage to the above scale. In this case, our hypothetical student would have a B- (81.79% is above 80% and below 83%).

Please note: final grades are final. Unless there is evidence that a final grade results from a mathematical error, students should not approach the professor to ask for additional extra credit, test points, or the like. If the professor were to change a student’s final grade due to special opportunities, this would constitute capricious grading and therefore would not comply with University of Utah policy.

Course Schedule

Week 1

**Unit 1: Science, health, environment**

*August 21 Tuesday*  
Introduction to Course

*Aug. 23 Thursday*  
Science Journalism  

Week 2

*Aug. 28 Tuesday*  
Public Understanding of Science  

*Aug. 30 Thursday*  
Scientific Debate

**Week 3**

**Sept. 4 Tuesday**

**Sept. 6 Thursday**

**Week 4**

**Sept. 11 Tuesday**

**Sept. 13 Thursday**

**Week 5**

**Sept. 18 Tuesday**

**TEST 1**

**Unit 2: Health, environment, science**

**Sept. 20 Thursday**

**Week 6**

**Sept. 25 Tuesday**

**Sept. 27 Thursday**

**Week 7**

**October 9 and 11**

**Fall Vacation**

**Week 8**

**Oct. 16 Tuesday**

**Health and Stigma**

*Oct. 18 Thursday*  
Health and Stigma  

**Week 9**

*Oct. 23 Tuesday*  
Interpersonal Health Communication  

*Oct. 25 Thursday*  
Interpersonal Health Communication  

**Week 10**

*Oct. 30 Tuesday*  
**TEST 2**

**Unit 3: Environment, science, health**

*Nov.1 Thursday*  
Environmental Reporting  

**Week 11**

*Nov. 6 Tuesday*  
Environmental Advocacy  

*Nov. 8 Thursday*  
Selling the Environment  

**Week 12**

*Nov. 13 and 15*  
No Class  
Professor Jensen is attending the National Communication Association conference in Orlando, FL.

**Week 13**

*Nov. 20 Tuesday*  
No Class  
Professor Jensen is attending the National Communication Association conference.

*Nov. 22 Thursday*  
Thanksgiving Break

**Week 14**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Author, Year, Title and Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 6</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>TEST 3</td>
<td></td>
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