COMM 3115: Communicating Science, Health, Environment  
University of Utah, Spring 2013  
Department of Communication  – LNCO, Room 1100; Tuesday/Thursday 12:25-1:45 a.m.

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Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 11-12, and by appointment  
Office Location: LNCO 2619

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Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 8-9:30 a.m., and by appointment  
Office Location: 130 SIL

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, nanotechnology, 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.

Objectives

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/or the environment
• **Differentiate among types of methodologies** that are commonly used in research on communication about science, health, and the environment
Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 3</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exam 1 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from January 8 to February 5.

Exam 2 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from February 7 to March 7.

Exam 3 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from March 19 to April 23.

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 (February 5, March 7, and April 23). Given the large enrollment for this class, permission will not be given to take any of the exams (even the final exam) early. Please plan accordingly by dropping this class (and planning to take it in a future semester) if you will not be able to be in class on those days.

*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 or the graduate teaching assistant 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 during the first week of class so that the necessary accommodations can be made. University’s ADA policy: [http://disability.utah.edu/](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](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](http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html)
- **Attendance:** [http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/attend.php](http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/attend.php)
- **Grade Disputes:** [http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html](http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html)
- **Incompletes:** [http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/incomplete.php](http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/incomplete.php)
- **Student Privacy:** [http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/ferpa.php](http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/ferpa.php)
- **Withdrawals:** [http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/withdrawal.php](http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/withdrawal.php)

**Materials**

All readings are available via the course Canvas page. Go to “files” and click on the “readings” folders. The readings will be categorized by lecture number, author last name, and date of publication. Under “files” you will also find an updated copy of the syllabus, and power points from past lectures. Please check the Canvas page regularly for course updates.

**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>
<tr>
<td>70% and up</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67% and up</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63% and up</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60% and up</td>
<td>D-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59% and below</td>
<td>F*</td>
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*Students that score lower than a 55% on a test (after any curve or extra credit is incorporated to the grade) 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 81.6% (B-).

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

\[
(83 \times .30) + (68 \times .35) + (94 \times .35) = 81.6\%
\]

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- (81.6% 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.

Schedule

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

**Week 1**

*January 8 Tuesday*  
Introduction to Course

*January 10 Thursday*  
1.1 Science Journalism  
Week 2

January 15 Tuesday  
1.2 Public Understanding of Science

January 17 Thursday  
1.3 Scientific Debate

Week 3

January 22 Tuesday  
1.4 Scientific Debate

January 24 Thursday  
1.5 Scientific Debate

Week 4

January 29 Tuesday  
1.6 Scientific Debate

January 31 Thursday  
1.7 Scientific Reporting and Ethics

Week 5

February 5 Tuesday  
TEST 1

Unit 2: Health, environment, science

February 7 Thursday  
2.1 Mediated Health

Week 6

February 12 Tuesday  
2.2 Mediated Health
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 7 Thursday</td>
<td>TEST 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 11-15</td>
<td>Spring Vacation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Unit 3: Environment, science, health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 26-28 Tuesday and Thursday</td>
<td>No Class</td>
<td></td>
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Week 12

*April 2 Tuesday*  3.3 Selling the Environment

*April 4 Thursday*  3.4 Selling the Environment

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Week 13

*April 9 Tuesday*  3.5 Environmental Argumentation

*April 11 Thursday*  3.6 Environmental Argumentation

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Week 14

*April 16 Tuesday*  3.7 Communicating Environmental Risk

*April 18 Thursday*  No Class (review day)

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Week 15

*April 23 Tuesday*  TEST 3* last day of class