

The 2004 Public Health Institute

May 24 – June 11, 2004

COURSE SYLLABUS

PubH 7200-116

Media Relations Practicum: Mass Media Coverage of Risk

Credits: 1.0

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| Course meeting times: | June 1-4, 2004 |
| Instructor: | Brian Southwell Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota Buddy Ferguson, Risk Communication Specialist, Minnesota Department of Health |
| Address: | Southwell 111 Murphy Hall 206 Church Street SE Minneapolis, MN 55455 |
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| Office hours: | By appointment |

I. Course Description

This course both describes the current news and entertainment environment regarding health and risk in the United States and offers recommendations and exercises intended to improve professional practice in that arena. Students familiar with basic risk communication ideas should find the opportunity to practice those concepts useful. Students unfamiliar with risk communication concepts should find the course to be a useful introduction.

II. Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, each student should be able to do the following:

1. Describe the current terrain of media coverage regarding health and risk.
2. Discuss explanations for the typical nature of coverage.
3. Begin to address the communication needs for organizations that produce or house information involving health risk and deal with media professionals.
4. Begin to investigate pertinent information about an issue or incident involving health risk as a media professional would do.

III. Methods of Instruction and Work Expectations

This course will be highly interactive and students will be expected to participate in a series of exercises in which they perform either the role of communication professional providing information about risk or media professional who is developing content for a mass media outlet.

IV. Grading

1. Grading Criteria: This course is offered A/F or S/N

- A/F letter grade will be determined by total effort as follows:

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| A = 90-100% | (4.0) Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements. |
| A- = | |
| B+ = | |
| B = 80-90% | (3.0) Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements. |
| B- = | |
| C+ = | |
| C = 70-80% | (2.0) Represents achievement that meets the minimum course requirements. |
| C- = | |
| D+ = | |
| D = 60-70% | (1.0) Achievement below minimum course expectations but sufficient to be awarded credit. |
| D- = | |
| F = below 60% | Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I. |

- S/N option must complete all assignments to a C- level (70%):

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| S | Achievement that is satisfactory will be expected to complete all assignments and receive a minimum of 70% to receive a passing score (achievement required for an S is at the discretion of the instructor but may be no lower than a 70%). |
| F | Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I. |

2. **Grading Option** – Students may change grading options during the initial registration period or during the first two days of the term. **The grading option may not be changed after the second day of class.**
3. **Course Incomplete** – An incomplete grade is permitted only in cases of extraordinary circumstances and following consultation with the instructor. In such cases and “I” grade will require a specific written agreement between the instructor and the student specifying the time and manner in which the student will complete the course requirements. Extension for completion of the work will not exceed one year.
4. **Scholastic Dishonesty** – This course follows the University of Minnesota Board of Regents’ policy on student conduct and scholastic dishonesty which can be found at:
<http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/academic/StudentConductCode.pdf>

A grade of “F” or “N” for the entire course will be assigned for scholastic dishonesty as defined in the policy and will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs <http://www.sja.umn.edu/>

Plagiarism is an important element of this policy. It is defined as the presentation of another’s writing or ideas as your own. Serious, intentional plagiarism will result in an “F” or “N” grade for this course. For more information on this policy and for a helpful discussion of preventing plagiarism, please consult University polices and procedures regarding academic integrity:

<http://cisw.cla.umn.edu/plagiarism/uofmpolicies.html>

Students are urged to be careful that they properly attribute and cite others’ work in their own writing. For guidelines for correctly citing sources, go to <http://tutorial.lib.umn.edu/>. In addition, original work is expected in this course. It is unacceptable to hand in assignments for this course for which you received credit in another course unless by prior agreement with the instructor. Building on a dissertation or final project is acceptable.

If you have any questions, consult the instructor.

V. Course Withdrawal

School of Public Health Students may withdraw from a course **through the second** day of the course without permission. No “W” will appear on the transcript. After the second day, students are required to do the following:

- The student must contact and notify their advisor and course instructor informing them of the decision to withdraw from the course.
- The student must send an email to the SPH Student Services Center (SSC). The email must provide the student name, ID#, course number, section number, semester, and year with instructions to withdraw the student from the course, and acknowledgement that the instructor and advisor have been contacted.
- The advisor and instructor must email the SSC acknowledging the student is canceling the course. All parties must be notified of the student’s intent.
- The SSC will complete the process by withdrawing the student from the course after receiving all emails (student, advisor and instructor). A “W” will be placed and remain on the student transcript for the course.
- After discussion with their advisor and notification to the instructor, students may withdraw until the end of the second day of class. There is no appeal process.

VI. Disabilities

Any student with a documented disability (e.g. physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact the instructor and Disability Services at the beginning of the term. All discussions remain confidential. For further information contact the University of Minnesota Disability Services website at <http://ds.umn.edu/> or call 612-626-1333 (V/TTY).

VII. Course Text and Readings

Griffin, R.J. (1999). Using systematic thinking to choose and evaluate evidence. In Friedman, S.M., and Dunwoody, S., and Rogers, C.L. (Eds.) *Communicating Uncertainty*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. P. 225-248.

Steib, P.A. (2002). *Communication in Risk Situations: Responding to the Communication Challenges Posed by Bioterrorism and Emerging Infectious Diseases*. Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. Available on-line at:

<http://www.astho.org/pubs/ASTHO%20Risk%20Communication%20-Workbook.htm>

VIII. Course Outline/Weekly Schedule

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| June 1 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. | Overview of health and risk news coverage |
| June 2 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. | Overview of health and risk news coverage |
| June 3 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. | In-class exercises |
| June 4 2:00 – 5:00 p.m. | In-class exercises |

IX. Class Project

To be discussed in class.