COMM 3115: Communicating Science, Health, Environment
University of Utah, Fall 2018
Department of Communication
LNCO, Room 1100; Monday/Wednesday 11:50 a.m.-1:10 p.m.

Professor: Robin E. Jensen, Ph.D.
E-mail: r.e.jensen@utah.edu
Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday 1:15-2:15, and by appointment
Office Location: LNCO 2619

Graduate Teaching Assistant: Emily Krebs
E-mail: emily.krebs@utah.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday/Thursday 10:00-11:30, and by appointment
Office Location: LNCO 2880

Description

Communication plays a fundamental role in public perceptions 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 facilitating such communication and 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** surrounding 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 the communication of 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 August 22 to September 19.

Exam 2 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from September 24 to October 31.

Exam 3 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from November 5 to December 13.

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 19, October 31, and December 13). 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 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.

In the event that a school-sponsored activity or religious holiday overlaps with a test date, students who let the professor know about their absence as soon as possible (preferably at the beginning of the semester) will be able to take the test at a rescheduled time and day.

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 silence all phones and other electronic devices 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/

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://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php (see Section Q)

Materials

All readings are available via the course Canvas page. Go to “files” and click on the “course 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<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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</tbody>
</table>

*Students who score lower than a 55% on a test (after any curve or extra credit is incorporated into 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-).

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

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

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 or graduate teaching assistant to ask for additional extra credit, test points, or the like.

**Course Schedule**

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

**Week 1**

*August 20 Monday*  
Course Introduction

*August 22 Wednesday*  
1.1 Science Journalism  
### Week 2

**August 27 Monday**  
1.2 Public Understanding of Science  

**August 29 Wednesday**  
1.3 Scientific Debate  

### Week 3

**September 3 Monday**  
Labor Day—University Holiday/No Class

**September 5 Wednesday**  
1.4 Scientific Debate  

### Week 4

**September 10 Monday**  
1.5 Scientific Debate  

**September 12 Wednesday**  
1.6 Scientific Debate  

### Week 5

**September 17 Monday**  
1.7 Scientific Reporting and Ethics  

**September 19 Wednesday**  
**EXAM 1**  
Unit 2: Health, environment, science

### Week 6

**September 24 Monday**  
2.1 Mediated Health  

**September 26 Wednesday**  
No Class

Professor Jensen is presenting research at the Public Address Conference in Boulder, CO.
Week 7

October 1 Monday  2.2 Mediated Health

October 3 Wednesday  No Class

Week 8

October 8-12  Fall Break—University Holiday/No Class

Week 9

October 15 Monday  2.3 Health and Stigma

October 17 Wednesday  2.4 Health and Stigma

Week 10

October 22 Monday  2.5 TBA
Lecture by T.A. Emily Krebs.

October 29 Wednesday  2.6 Interpersonal Health Communication

Week 11

October 29 Monday  2.7 Health/Organizational Communication

October 31 Wednesday  EXAM 2

Week 12

Unit 3: Environment, science, health

November 5 Monday  3.1 Environmental Reporting

November 7 Wednesday  No Class
Professor Jensen will be presenting research at the National Communication Association Conference in Salt Lake City, UT.
Week 13
November 12 Monday  3.2 Environmental Advocacy

November 14 Wednesday  3.3 Selling the Environment

Week 14
November 19 Monday  3.4 Selling the Environment

November 21 Wednesday  No Class—Happy Holiday

Week 15
November 26 Monday  3.5 Environmental Argumentation

November 28 Wednesday  3.6 Environmental Argumentation

FINAL
December 13 Thursday 10:30-12:30  EXAM 3