

COMM 3115: Communicating Science, Health, Environment

University of Utah, Fall 2013
Department of Communication
LNCO, Room 1100; Tuesday/Thursday 12:25-1:45 p.m.

Professor: Robin E. Jensen, Ph.D.

E-mail: r.e.jensen@utah.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 3:00-4:00 p.m., and by appointment

Office Location: LNCO 2619

Graduate Teaching Assistant: Melinda Krakow, M.A.

E-mail: melinda.krakow@utah.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 11 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Office Location: LNCO 2930

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 that emerge in such communication and to assess their associated consequences in terms of lay beliefs about issues such as nanotechnology, pandemics, climate change, 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** related to 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

Assignment

Percentage of Final Grade

Exam 1: Science

30%

Exam 1 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from August 27 to September 26.

Exam 2: Health

35%

Exam 2 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from October 1 to November 5.

Exam 3: Environment

35%

Exam 3 covers all lectures, discussions, and readings from November 7 to December 12.

Policies

Attendance on Test Days: By enrolling for this course, you have made a commitment to taking the tests on the days that they are set to be administered (**September 26, November 5, and December 12**). 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 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 it would be appropriate for you 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 or the graduate teaching assistant. 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/>

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://admin.utah.edu/facdev/pdf/accommodations-policy-background.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>

Materials

All readings are available via the course Canvas page. Go to "files" on the left-hand sidebar 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 lectures that have already been covered or are next up for discussion. 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:

<u>Test Grade</u>	<u>Letter Grade</u>
90% and up	A
87% and up	B+
83% and up	B
80% and up	B-
77% and up	C+
73% and up	C
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 (after any curve 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-).

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

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

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

Schedule

Unit 1: Science, health, environment

Week 1

August 27 Tuesday

Introduction to Course

August 29 Thursday

1.1 Science Journalism

Dunwoody, S. (2008). Science journalism. In M. Bucchi & B. Trench (Eds.), *Handbook of public communication of science and technology* (pp. 15-25). New York: Routledge.

Week 2

September 3 Tuesday

1.2 Public Understanding of Science

Landau, J., Groscurth, C. R., Wright, L., & Condit, C. (2009). Visualizing nanotechnology: The impact of visual images on lay American audience associations with nanotechnology. *Public Understanding of Science, 18*, 325-337.

September 5 Thursday

1.3 Scientific Debate

Keränen, L. (2005). Mapping misconduct: Demarcating legitimate science from “fraud” in the B-06 Lumpectomy Controversy. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 42*, 94-113.

Week 3

September 10 Tuesday

1.4 Scientific Debate

Jensen, R. E. (2007). Using science to argue for sexual education in U.S. public schools: Ella Flagg Young and the 1913 “Chicago Experiment.” *Science Communication, 29*, 217-241.

September 12 Thursday

1.5 Scientific Debate

Boyd, J. (2002). Public and technical interdependence: Regulatory controversy, out-law discourse, and the messy case of Olestra. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 39*, 91-109.

Week 4

September 17 Tuesday

1.6 Scientific Debate

Wastyn, R. O., & Wastyn, M. L. (1997). Argument within a scientific debate: The case of the DRD2 A1 ALLELE as a gene for alcoholism. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 34*, 13-26.

September 19 Thursday

No Class

Week 5

September 24 Tuesday

1.7 Scientific Reporting and Ethics

Solomon, M. (1985). The rhetoric of dehumanization: An analysis of medical reports of the Tuskegee syphilis project. *Western Journal of Communication, 49*, 233-247.

September 26 Thursday

TEST 1

Week 6

Unit 2: Health, environment, science

October 1 Tuesday

2.1 Mediated Health

Condit, C. M., & Condit, D. M. (2001). Blueprints and recipes: Gendered metaphors for genetic medicine. *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 22, 29-39.

October 3 Thursday

2.2 Mediated Health

Jensen, J. D., Carcioppolo, N., King, A. J., Bernat, J. K., Davis, L. A., Yale, R., & Smith, J. (2011). Including limitations in news coverage of cancer research: Effects of news hedging on fatalism, medical skepticism, patient trust, and backlash. *Journal of Health Communication*, 16, 486-503.

Week 7

October 8 Tuesday

2.3 Health and Stigma

Shugart, H. A. (2011). Shifting the balance: The contemporary narrative of obesity. *Health Communication*, 26, 37-47.

October 10 Thursday

2.4 Health/Organizational Communication

Haynes, A. B., et al. (2009). A surgical safety checklist to reduce morbidity and mortality in a global population. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 360, 491-499.

FALL BREAK October 15th and 17th

Week 8

October 22 Tuesday

2.5 Health and Stigma

Brouwer, D. (1998). The precarious visibility politics of self-stigmatization: The case of HIV/AIDS tattoos. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 18, 114-136.

October 24 Thursday

2.6 Health and Stigma

Canary, H. E. (2008). Negotiating dis/ability in families: Constructions and contradictions. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 36, 437-458.

Week 9

October 29 Tuesday

2.7 Interpersonal Health Communication

Keränen, L. (2007). "Cause someday we all die": Rhetoric, agency, and the case of the "patient" preferences worksheet. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 93, 179-210.

October 31 Thursday

2.8 Interpersonal Health Communication

Bergstrom, M. J., & Holmes, M. E. (2000). Lay theories of successful aging after the death of a spouse: A network text analysis of bereavement advice. *Health Communication*, 12, 377-406.

Week 10

November 5 Tuesday

TEST 2

Unit 3: Environment, science, health

November 7 Thursday

3.1 Environmental Reporting

Larson, B. M. H., Nerlich, B., & Wallis, P. (2005). Metaphors and biorisks: The war on infectious diseases and invasive species. *Science Communication*, 26, 243-268.

Week 11

November 12 Tuesday

3.2 Environmental Advocacy

Schweizer, S., Thompson, J. L., Teel, T., & Bruyere, B. (2009). Strategies for communicating about climate change impacts on public lands. *Science Communication*, 31, 266-274.

November 14 Thursday

3.3 Selling the Environment

DeLuca, K. M., & Demo, A. T. (2000). Imaging nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the birth of environmentalism. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 17, 241-260.

Week 12

November 19 Tuesday

3.4 Selling the Environment

Corbett, J. (2002). A faint green sell: Advertising and the natural world. In M. Meister & P. M. Japp (Eds.), *EnviroPOP: Studies in environmental rhetoric and popular culture* (pp. 141-160). Westport, CT: Praeger.

November 21 Thursday

No Class

Week 13

November 26 Tuesday

No Class

November 28 Thursday

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

December 3 Tuesday

3.5 Environmental Argumentation

Endres, D. (2009) Science and public participation: An analysis of public scientific argument in the Yucca Mountain controversy. *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, 3, 49-75.

December 5 Thursday

3.6 Environmental Argumentation

Pezzullo, P.C. (2003). Touring "Cancer Alley," Louisiana: Performances of community and memory for environmental justice. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 23, 226-252.

Week 15

December 10 Tuesday

No Class (review day)

December 12 Thursday

TEST 3* last day of class
