



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY  
School of Continuing Studies  
Emergency and Disaster Management

## **MPDM-620: Risk Perception Awareness, Public Communication, and Stakeholder Engagement**

Course Syllabus – Spring 2017

Thursdays, 5:20pm – 7:50pm, January 12 – May 11

### **Instructor: Hannah M. Vick**

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Office Hours - By Appointment & Email Response within 48 hours

Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies, 640 Massachusetts Ave, NW

### **Course Description**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to risk perception and risk communication through an exploration of theories, cultural themes, current strategies, and best practices. Using research from a variety of disciplines, students are presented with the complexities of communicating risk and strategies for overcoming barriers toward effectiveness. Discussions will revolve around current events and high-profile risk communication examples. Students will apply the theoretical underpinnings of risk communication to the practice of disaster management, with a greater understanding of how practitioners/scientists/experts communicate risk to individuals and communities.

In this class, students will learn:

- the historical and current theoretical models of risk perception and communication,
- how risk is communicated to audiences,
- how individuals and communities perceive risk and risk management,
- the interaction of risk perception and disaster management, both in practice and theory,
- how vulnerability affects risk perception and communication,
- and best strategies for effectively communicating risk and engaging stakeholders.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Describe the evolution of theoretical approaches to risk and risk communication,
- Describe various ways theoretical models and approaches are applied to disaster management in practice,
- Analyze ways risk is communicated to and through stakeholders,
- Investigate the influence of individual and community risk perception on behavior based on current research,
- Describe how social vulnerability affects risk communication effectiveness,
- Analyze risk communication plans, strategies, technology, and tools,
- Apply current risk perception research to overcome barriers to communication challenges,

- Investigate in-depth a historical event where risk communication techniques were used.

### **Required Texts**

- Boiarsky, C. (2016). *Risk Communication and Miscommunication: Case Studies in Science, Technology, Engineering, Government, and Community Organizations* (1 edition). Boulder: University Press of Colorado.
- Lundgren, R. E., & McMakin, A. H. (2013). *Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks* (5th edition). Wiley-IEEE Press.
- Tierney, K. (2014). *The Social Roots of Risk: Producing Disasters, Promoting Resilience*. Stanford University Press.

### **Attendance Policy and Class Participation**

Students are expected to attend all sessions of the course, read the assigned literature, and actively engage in class discussions. Active participation in the classroom is a part of the learning process at the graduate level and complex concepts – such as risk communication – require exploration through discussion and debate.

As outlined by the university, missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). Absences for classes beyond the initial two will result in further reduction of the final grade. If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

### **Late Assignment Policy**

Assignments turned in late will result in a grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-) for each day that it is late. If you have extenuating circumstances, speak with the instructor as far in advance of the due date as possible. Extensions will be considered only in the case of genuine exceptional circumstances and must be requested at least 72 hours prior to deadline.

### **Classroom Etiquette and Other Guidelines**

Professionalism is expected and required in the classroom, from both the instructor and students. All participants will be respectful of each other in their speech and behavior. One of the best ways to show respect for your colleagues is through active engagement during class and thorough preparation of readings/completion of the assignments.

Students should use laptops, tablets, and phones in order to directly support classroom activities. All devices should be placed on silent during class. Recording in the classroom is not permitted.

It is possible that one or two classroom sessions will be held through the online videoconferencing tool Zoom. If a class session needs to be conducted using Zoom, students will be notified as soon as possible and instructions for participation will be emailed.

## **Assignments**

### ***In Class Participation & Discussion Questions***

Full participation in the classroom is part of individual and course success; all students are required to participate through reading assigned texts before class and contributing to class discussions.

The majority of the assigned readings are from academic research journals. The cornerstone of graduate-level disaster management education is understanding how social science research is conducted and communicated. Several readings are provided (listed in Week 2 readings) to assist students comprehend academic literature; if you need assistance, please contact the instructor as soon as possible for additional guidance.

Each week, students are required to submit six (6) questions for discussion prompted by the readings. The questions must be submitted via email and Canvas by midnight on the Tuesday before class. The questions should demonstrate the student's ability to read the material and offer thoughtful inquiry about the concepts presented in the texts. Class participation and weekly submission of questions is 20% of your grade.

### ***Reflection Paper***

In Week 4, students are required to submit a three (3) page paper offering their reflection of the material presented in class during Weeks 1-3. This paper should cover the student's thoughts about the readings and discussions, as well as any insights the student gained from new ideas or concepts presented. This paper is a personal reflection paper, but any texts referenced should still be appropriately cited using APA style. The Reflection Paper is worth 15% of your grade.

A detailed description/prompt and a rubric indicating how students' work will be evaluated can be found in Canvas.

### ***Risk Communication Theory Paper***

Students will write a paper (5-6 pages) about a risk communication theory (found in class readings or discussed in class) that was used to conduct a social science research project. Students will use a research-based article found in a peer-reviewed academic journal, identify the risk communication theory, explain how the authors used the theory, provide an overview of the purpose, methods and results of the research, and analyze the pros/cons of using the theory as the basis of the research project. The Risk Communication Theory Paper is worth 20% of your grade.

A detailed description/prompt and a rubric indicating how students' work will be evaluated can be found in Canvas.

### ***Case Study Outline***

Students will prepare an outline of their final case study project, which will include a topic of their choice, key literature, methods, discussion/analysis and conclusion. The purpose of submitting the outline is get feedback from the instructor on the organization and content of the final paper. The more effort is put into the outline, the better the final paper (and your grade) will be. The Case Study Outline is 5% of your grade.

***Final Case Study Project - Paper, Summary and Presentation***

Students will complete an extended case study and present their work to the class to demonstrate their understanding of the theories/concepts from the academic literature, the application of communication strategies, and analysis of the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of risk communication techniques.

Students will write a paper (not more than 15 pages), with a list of academic references, Power Point slide deck (3-5 slides), and a class presentation with questions (10 minutes + 5 minutes for Q&A). The Final Case Study Project is 40% of your grade.

A detailed description/prompt and a rubric indicating how students’ work will be evaluated can be found in Canvas.

All written assignments should conform to APA style guide. All papers should be double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, with 1” margins and include page numbers.

**Grading**

Your course grade will be based on the following:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Submission</b>	<b>Grade %</b>
Class Participation and Weekly Questions	Weekly, in class – Hard Copy & via Canvas	20%
Reflection Paper	Hard Copy & via Canvas	15%
Risk Communication Theory Paper	Hard Copy & via Canvas	20%
Case Study Outline	Hard Copy & via Canvas	5%
Final Case Study Paper and Presentation	Hard Copy, via Canvas & In class	40%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

A	95-100%	B-	80-82%
A-	90-94%	C	70-79%
B+	87-89%	F	0-69%
B	83-86%		

**Withdrawal Policy and Calendar**

Should a student voluntarily withdraw from this course, credit for tuition will be calculated by the date of the student’s official notice to the Program Manager, according to periods and percentages listed below. **The last day to withdraw from this course is April 27, 2017.**

Dates	Percentage Refunded
Jan 19 – 24	100%
Jan 25 – Feb 7	80%
Feb 8 – 21	70%
Feb 22 – Mar 7	50%
Mar 8 – 14	40%

## Academic Resources

### Library Services

SCS Librarian: Jessica Vanderhoff

202-784-7389; [jessica.vanderhoff@georgetown.edu](mailto:jessica.vanderhoff@georgetown.edu)

<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/scs>

Emergency and Disaster Management Research Guide:

<http://guides.library.georgetown.edu/EDM>

### Writing Center

202-687-4246; <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>

### Academic Resource Center

202-687-8354; [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu); <https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/>

## Students with Disabilities

Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (ARC) (202-784-7366; [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu); <http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/>) before the start of classes to allow their office time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

## Georgetown Honor System

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown University. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. The Georgetown Honor Code pledge reads as follows:

*In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: to be honest in any academic endeavor and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*