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COMX 424.B01: Risk, Crisis, and Communication

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COMX 424 Risk and Crisis Communication
Fall 2020
12:30-1:50 T Th
GBB 106 and Zoom

Instructors: Joel Iverson, Ph.D.
 E-mail: joel.iverson@umontana.edu
 Office: Zoom and occasionally LA 359 in that order
 Office Hours: Before and after class and by appointment for zoom or outdoor meeting.

Course Description

This course explores the communicative dynamics that both prevent and cause organizational crises. The course examines how people plan, communicate and make good decisions when there is high-risk and little room for error like often exists for firefighters, airline pilots, oil rig workers or those that work on nuclear reactors. In addition, the course focuses on crisis communication and public relations in a wide array of organizations. The class will explore well-known crisis cases studies to better understand how to anticipate, prevent and manage organizational crisis.

Course Objectives As a result of satisfactorily completing the course, students should be able to do the following:

1. Understand how risk is socially represented, constructed and maintained.
2. Apply concepts of risk to your life choices and messages in the public sphere.
3. Understand major organizational accidents as systems accidents.
4. Know the principles of high-reliability organizations.
5. Identify organizational communication practices that are likely to reduce the risk of accidents.
6. Understand how decision-making and sense-making processes are influenced by crisis.
7. Identify the stages of organizational crisis.
8. Understand crisis communication and how to manage crisis public relations.
9. Identify key ethical issues related to the management and prevention of organizational crisis.
10. Write analytic papers in which they make clear arguments and then defend their positions with strong supporting evidence.
11. Engage writing as an ongoing process that includes the need for revisions.

Readings

- Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2018). *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. **Fourth Edition**
- Additional readings will be assigned and available on the Moodle.

Writing Center

The writing and public speaking center is a great resource located in Llommassonn 271, Phone: (406) 243-2266, growl@mso.umt.edu to the best of my knowledge.

Course Requirements

These are subject to modification (not increase) due to current pandemic and other potential disruptions.

Celebration of Knowledge: There will be one event, a Celebration of Knowledge, similar to what you know as examinations. This Celebration of Knowledge will cover the chapters, notes and readings. Since this is a writing course, the format of the exams will consist of short answer/essay questions as well as a few matching or multiple guess questions. This celebration will serve to review and allow you the

opportunity to synthesize the material we cover as well as express your own thoughts beyond the discussion.

Papers: There will be two papers for this class. Each have a rewrite. One rewrite is mandatory (thus three papers, in a grading sense). They will be 5-6 pages and 7-10 pages. The first paper will be an analysis of a risk found in the media and other sources (mandatory rewrite for a second grade). The second paper will analyze a crisis (optional rewrite). The crisis papers will also be presented on the last day of the semester. More details to come on each as is needed.

Participation: Attendance is expected and participation is needed. The biggest difference historically has been level of participation. I will have periodic online assignments to check in with your understanding of the material. These will be online and posted in the Moodle.

Grading

Our Grading Philosophy: An assignment that meets, but does not exceed the basic requirements will receive a grade somewhere in the “C” range. So, for example, if a written assignment requires you to answer a series of four (4) questions and you only answer three (3) questions, the MOST you can expect to receive on that assignment is 75%--regardless of how well you answered the other three questions. Assignments are developed to achieve a variety of academic and assessment goals and I have attempted to be very specific in the assignments about exactly what is required. So, if you have a question about the assignment—its content, format, etc., just ask. I welcome the opportunity to work with you on any of your projects. I will offer suggestions and review drafts. Please, if there is any doubt, do not hesitate to ask.

To earn an “A” on an assignment, you will need to be extremely proficient at explaining, applying, evaluating, and synthesizing the concepts, models, and theories covered in this class. An “A” goes to truly excellent work. I hope you will approach this grading philosophy as a challenge.

Paper One	_____	1000 points
Paper Two (rewrite)	_____	1000 points
Paper Three	_____	1000 points
Celebration 1	_____	1000 points
Participation	_____	1000 points
Total	_____	5,000 points

Grading Scale: Grades in this class will not be curved, and will be assigned on the following scale:

A = Outstanding - goes beyond expectations, A 93-100%, A- 90-92%

B = Good - above average, B+ 88-89%, B 83-87%, B- 80-82%

C = Satisfactory - meets minimum requirements, C+ 78-79%, C 73-77%, C- 70-72%

D = Unsatisfactory - does not meet some requirements, D+ 68-69%, D 63-67%

F = Failing -- Does not meet requirements, F anything below 63%

As per our departmental policy, you may not drop or change your grading option after the thirtieth instructional day except in the following situations: a) documentable accident or illness, b) no evaluation record for the course, c) documentable family/personal emergency, and d) documentable change in employment schedule that prevents completion of course (ref. relevant university documentation).

Remember that grades are earned, not given. Grades do not define who you are, but do reflect on the outcome or product you turn in. I cannot evaluate effort, but effort does tend to result in a better outcome. I work to fairly evaluate the work on the criteria we set forth. If you feel I have made an error in evaluation, write down that objection to my

evaluation of the content and then email me. I am happy to correct mistakes I have made. I do not change grades because someone wants or thinks they should get a different grade. I evaluate the outcome.

Policies

1. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University.
2. All students must be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at <https://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/default.php>
3. All celebrations of knowledge will be due on the assigned date
4. Papers will be typed and proofread and turned in on the date assigned in APA format.

Respectful Environment: You will be expected to act respectfully towards others in this class and assist in maintaining a civil and professional atmosphere for the class including discussions, email, and other exciting interactions. This includes respecting differing opinions, not using vulgar language, and creating a supportive environment.

Disability Statement

If you have a disability for which accommodations are needed please contact me in the first week of the semester. We will discuss what accommodations you need and will receive in this course. Also, please contact:

Disability Services for Students (DSS)
Lommasson Center 154
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812

(406) 243-2243 (Voice/Text)
FAX 406-243-5330
<http://life.umt.edu/dss/>

Any students who need special accommodations for learning or who have special needs are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor as soon as possible.

COVID-19 Pandemic Rules/Policies:

- Mask use is required within the classroom
- Each student is provided with a cleaning kit. The expectation is that students will clean their personal work space when they arrive for class, and before they leave the classroom
- Classrooms may have one-way entrances / exits to minimize crowding
- Students should be discouraged from congregating outside the classroom before and after class
- Specific seating arrangements will be used to ensure social distancing and support contact tracing efforts
- Class attendance will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom (which requires mask removal)
- Information on the nearest "refill" stations for cleaning supplies/hand sanitizer if applicable
- If the class is being recorded, students must be notified of the recording
- Stay home if you feel sick and/or if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms
- If the student is sick or displaying symptoms, please contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330
- Up-to-Date COVID-19 Information from the University of Montana
- UM Coronavirus Website: <https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus>
- UM COVID-19 Fall 2020 website: <https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus/fall2020.php>
- Strongly encourage students to remain vigilant outside the classroom in mitigating the spread of COVID-19

Other Policies for the Course

- **Attendance:** Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Participation is a critical element in any communication course. Moreover, students who choose not to attend the lectures tend to have a more difficult time completing their assignments than do those students who attend regularly. Whenever possible, the instructor should be notified in advance if students must miss class.
- **Illness:** Students should not attend class when ill.
- **Participation:** Students are encouraged to participate in all lectures/discussions. When students share their experiences with the class, the course material often becomes more interesting and comprehensible.

- **Individual Meetings:** Students are highly encouraged to interact with the instructor outside of class. A few minutes with the instructor can often eliminate confusion or anxiety concerning an assignment. Students unable to meet with the instructor during office hours are encouraged to make appointments at other times.
- **Late Work:** All assignments are due on time. “Make-up” assignments will be allowed only if a compelling excuse is offered. If a compelling excuse is not offered, the instructor will allow the student to complete a version of the assignment for a 10% reduction in total points for every day late. Students who fail to turn in position papers or in-class assignments on time without a compelling excuse will have no makeup opportunities.
- **Academic Honesty:** All work in this course must be completed in a manner consistent with the USM policies and standards for academic honesty (see <http://www.usm.edu/union/studenthandbook.pdf>).
- **Academic Honesty Defined:** All written work and oral presentations must respect the intellectual rights of others. Any material from another person that is used word-for-word must be enclosed in quotation marks or, for a long passage, formatted as a block quotation. Paraphrased or summarized material or copied organizational structures must be cited appropriately.

Tentative Schedule

VERY tentative. This can totally change but you will be notified. Stay tuned!

Aug 20	Intro Day Syllabus, Moodle tour and risk and crisis intro
25 27	Organizational Communication and Constituting Crisis – Moodle videos and online Chapter 1 Crisis
Sep 1 3	Risk unit #1 – Read masks reports, Risk Savvy, and Venette article Risk
8 10	Crisis Theory – Read Chapter 2 Theory continued
15 17	Chapters 3&4 3&4 continued
	Paper #1 Risk Due Friday, Sept 18 at 11:59 PM
22 24	Chapter 4 wrap-up Chapters 5 & 6
29 Oct 1	5 & 6 Chapter 6 wrap-up
6,8	Risk Unit 2 – Chapter 10, Brown Reading, Online practice Paper #2 (Rewrite of Paper #1) Due Friday, Oct 9, 11:59 PM
13 15	Chapter 7 & 8 7& 8
	Celebration of Knowledge (online) Due Sunday, October 18, 11:59 PM
20 22	Finish Chapter 8 Chapter 9 Learning
27,29 Nov 3 5	HRO and Learning Voting – No class Renewal – class discussion Crisis Paper (#3) due Friday 6th at 11:59
10,12	Chaos, Complexity and Quantum Crisis (Paper #3 returned by Friday, 13 th – very lucky!)
17	Finish quantum theory discussion
19	Final 3:20-5:20, technically, but online in all likelihood Rewrite (optional) of crisis paper due by Tuesday, Nov 24th 11:59 PM