



Disaster Communications and Media Relations

Syllabus

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Course Description:

This course will provide an overview of crisis communication challenges associated with disasters, including basic human communications and communication needs, the impact of stressors in communications, risk communications to communities and to crisis responders, command and control, publicly accepted crisis communication techniques, and the technologies related to crisis communications. Students will learn the theoretical foundations of risk communication, how to apply those principles during a public health crisis, and how to formulate and institute appropriate communications plans for a variety of audiences and disaster response organizations.

The course will begin by exploring the issues and complexities of human communications in crisis scenarios. It will expand on that learning to explore the nature of humans operating as a system and how communications allow the system to accomplish system-level goals. It will then begin to apply that understanding to various crisis situations to build a better understanding of the underlying effects and patterns of communications in crisis situations. Finally, the course will focus on issues particular to healthcare and first responder communications within the context of bio-security and national response situations. All of this will be accomplished through a set of readings, threaded discussions and assignments.

Although there is an overall building-block structure to the course, there will be many topics that overlap. This is to allow practical exposure at all levels of the discussion. Throughout the course, assignments will be provided which will assist students in absorbing the theoretical principles, and in understanding the practical applications.

Course Goal:

Through the exploration of communication issues and techniques, students will gain knowledge of crisis communication needs and solutions. At the end of the course, they will be able to address the communication aspect of crisis management plans, and be able to understand and react to all levels of communication needs during a crisis, including a major bio-security event.

Course Objectives:

At the conclusion of this course a student will be able to demonstrate:

1. An understanding of the impact disaster situations have on baseline communications capabilities at the human, organizational, command, and technology layers.
2. An understanding of and sensitivity to the unique requirements of communicating ongoing bio-security risk to different stakeholders including responders, care-givers, the local and national media, and the public
3. Knowledge of communication expectations in existing national, state and local response plans for disasters and biological incidents in particular, including political realities and technical capabilities
4. Ability to synthesize all of that communications knowledge into actionable recommendations for organizations that need to respond to a biological incident.

Course Format: Lectures, seminar discussions, and readings.

Evaluation of Performance:

- Participation in online seminar discussions.....20%
- Assignments.....50%
- On-line Exams (4)30%
 - Test 17.5%
 - Test 27.5%
 - Test 37.5%
 - Test 47.5%

According to the Saint Louis University Graduate School, the only final grades allowed are:

A (≥ 93 points)

- B+ (90 – 92 points)
- B (83 – 89 points)
- B- (80 – 82 points)
- C (73 – 79 points)
- F (≤ 72 points)

Due Dates:

Sunday, January 21nd	On-Line Discussion 1
Sunday, January 28th	On-Line Discussion 2
Sunday, February 4th	Paper 1
	First exam: Human Communications in Crisis
Sunday, February 11th	On-Line Discussion 3
Sunday February 18th	On-line Discussion 4
Sunday, February 25th	Paper 2
	Second exam: Crisis and Risk communication
Sunday, March 4th	On-line discussion 5
Sunday, March 11th	On-line discussion 6
Sunday, March 25th	On-line discussion 7
Sunday, April 1st	Third exam: Public Crisis Response Communications Structures
Sunday, April 8th	On-line discussion 8
Sunday, April 15th	On-line discussion 9
Sunday, April 29th	Paper 3
Sunday, May 6th:	Final exam: Bio-security challenges and cumulative application

Course Policies:

- All class-associated email communication should take place through the course WebCT email.
- The week for class readings, assignments, and seminar discussion is defined as Monday through Sunday at midnight.
- Seminar discussions should begin early in the session to allow for maximum interaction.
- On the weeks for which there is a seminar discussion assignment, students are expected to access the WebCT seminar board at least twice a week unless you notify the instructor in advance of a schedule conflict. This will allow discussion of relevant topics in the electronic seminar.
- The standard for the course professor will be to login to the course at least 3 days of the week.
- Responses to all individual comments are not possible although answers to specific questions will be given.
- Students should notify the course professor early if they are unable to participate in a scheduled seminar or assignment during a specific week.

- Students must notify the instructor in advance if some life event or obligation precludes them from submitting an assignment on time. Project due dates are very flexible for military personnel that are deployed; please discuss this with the instructor.
- It is at the instructor's discretion to allow students to make-up missed assignments.
- All University, Graduate School, and School of Public Health policies and procedures are in effect, including, but not limited to, academic standards, course withdrawals, and course incompletes. Please refer to the:
 - [Catalog of the Graduate School](#)
 - [Office of the Bursar](#) (Student Accounts)
 - [Office of the University Registrar](#) (Student Services)
 - Institute for Biosecurity Policy Statement on Academic and Professional Integrity. Details on the Biosecurity Policy Statement on Academic and Professional Integrity are provided in the Academic Integrity link to the left of your WebCT course page and in the MS in Biosecurity Student Handbook.
 - More information, policies, and guidelines relevant to your education are available on the School of Public Health web site at: [SLU School of Public Health](#). It is your responsibility to become familiar with all information available through this and the Web sites above.

Required Texts:

- 1) American Psychological Association. (2003) Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. American Psychological Association. ISBN #1-55798-791-2
- 2) McLoughlin, Barry. (1999). Overcoming Panic and Fear; Risk and Crisis Communications. McLoughlin Multimedia Publishing Ltd. ISBN# 1-886712-09-3
- 3) Fernandez, Louie & Merzer, Martin. (2003). Jane's Crisis Communication Handbook. Jane's Information Group. ISBN # 0-7106-2596-0
- 4) Ursano, Robert J.; McCaughey, Brian G. & Fullerton, Carol S. eds. (2001). Trauma and Disaster; The Structure of Human Chaos. Cambridge University Press. ISBN # 0-521 55643-0

Texts may be purchased from any online vendor. Examples include [Amazon.com](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), and [ecampus.com](#). Please note that you may buy the paperback version of any of the books when it is available.

Course Outline:

For organizational purposes the course has been divided into the following sessions.

- **Human behavior in disaster and communications needs:** Weeks 1,2 & 3
 - Week 1: Introduction to crisis and communications
 - Week 2: Terror, Risk and the communications impact
 - Week 3: Command and Control

- **Crisis and Risk Communications:** Weeks 4, 5 & 6
 - Weeks 4,5: Risk communication
 - Week 6: Best Practices in Media Crisis and Risk Communications

- **Existing Public Response Communication Structures:** Weeks 7,8,9, & 10
 - Weeks 7, 8: National Response Plan, Training and Exercises
 - Weeks 9, 10: NIMS, MMRS Overview

- **Applying Crisis Communications:** Weeks 11, 12, 13
 - Week 11: Hospital and First Responder Issues and planning
 - Week 12: Bio-Terrorism, Pre-Event Messaging and Law Enforcement Issues
 - Week 13: Crisis Communications Technologies and Lessons Learned

Seminar Discussions:

For selected sessions, there will be a threaded discussion question or series of questions and each student is expected to participate in that discussion. All opinions stated in the seminar discussions must be backed up by fact and accompanied with an abbreviated citation.

You must follow the guidelines for participating in threaded seminar discussions.

Seminar guidelines:

- Students must email (through WebCT course email) their answer to the seminar question(s) to the instructor by Wednesday at midnight of the week that the question is posted.
- All student initial answers (that were emailed to the instructor) should be posted to the seminar discussion board by Thursday at midnight of the week that the question is posted. Student must NOT post their answer until Thursday at 12:01 am at the earliest. This time gap allows the instructor to receive all answers before students see other students' answers. To receive full points for seminar discussion interaction, students must respond to at least one other student's posting. Interaction responses should be posted by Sunday at midnight of the week that the question is posted. Comments should make a valuable contribution to the discussion by offering new insights or information. A simple "I agree" or some form thereof is *not* considered a sufficient posting for this class.
- Postings should be concise and consist of a minimum of one short paragraph and a maximum of three short paragraphs.
- All posts should be maintained under the initial posting (i.e., thread) started by the instructor for that week/session. This is accomplished by hitting "Reply" or "Quote"

rather than “Compose message”. This will allow for the week/session’s postings to be compiled under one post initiated by the instructor. Do not start a new post.

Papers:

The first and second papers are to be 3 - 4 pages double-spaced (not counting reference list) with appropriate citations. The third paper will be 8-15 pages. The paper and reference citations must in the American Psychological Association (APA) 5th Edition style.

Paper 1

The student will present a justification for continuous planning and training for disaster communications based on the knowledge the students have gained about human behavior in crisis situations. The paper will address both communications among responders, and communications directed at the public through the Media. The paper will recognize and address other response priorities for that money, including communication technologies in its justification.

Paper 2

The student will present a position regarding the national media’s role in risk communications. The student will speak to both the value and damage the national media can bring to a crisis situation, and defend a thesis that the national media would be either help or harm the crisis management efforts in a bioterrorism disaster.

Paper 3

The student will present a realistic communication time-line for a hypothetical smallpox outbreak, and make suggestions to improve the timeline.

- The fictional event will begin when the first physician of three suburban community hospitals with smallpox patients identifies the first smallpox case, and communicates it to the local Health Department.
- The communications considered will include local first responder command and control, reporting, media, community, and internal hospital communications.
- As the event expands and unfolds with the multiple participants and stakeholders, the student will speak to technical communications facilities, inter-agency communication, and media communication.
- The time-line will end at the point that DHS has taken control of the event management and has an Incident Command Structure in place.
- The student will utilize the structures described in the NIMS and the NRP in developing a realistic and well-reasoned flow of events.
- Then, the student will point out areas where the best case scenario is most likely to break down or experience unnecessary delays, along with recommendations to address those issues.