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Spring 2-1-2019

# COMX 424.01M: Risk, Crisis, and Communication

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**COMX 424 Risk and Crisis Communication**  
**Spring 2019**  
**1:00-1:50 M,W,F**  
**GBB L04**

Instructors: Joel Iverson, Ph.D.  
 E-mail: joel.iverson@umontana.edu  
 Office: LA 359  
 Office Hours: Joel – Monday 8:30-9:30 AM Wednesday 2-3 PM  
 and of course by appointment.

### **Course Description**

This course explores the communicative dynamics that both prevent and cause organizational crisis. 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. Understand major organizational accidents as systems accidents.
3. Know the principles of high-reliability organizations.
4. Identify organizational communication practices that are likely to reduce the risk of accidents.
5. Understand how decision-making and sense-making processes are influenced by crisis.
6. Identify the stages of organizational crisis.
7. Understand crisis communication and how to manage crisis public relations.
8. Identify key ethical issues related to the management and prevention of organizational crisis.
9. Write analytic papers in which they make clear arguments and then defend their positions with strong supporting evidence.
10. 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 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

### **Course Requirements**

**Celebrations 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, both will be 5-6 pages. The first paper will be an analysis of a risk found in the media and other sources. The second paper will analyze a crisis. These papers will also be presented on the last day of the semester. Both papers have an opportunity to rewrite for a better grade. More details to come on each as is needed.

**Case Presentation:** Each student will do a case presentation with a partner in the class and lead discussion. The cases will be selected from our text. Each pair of students are expected to evaluate the case beyond the description in the text and present their reflections and ideas to the class. Each presentation and discussion will be 15-20 minutes.

**Participation:** Attendance is expected and participation is needed. I will select random days to process for participation points. If you miss class for anything other than a university or medical (documented) reason, you run the risk of losing the points for that day. Work and other obligations are may come up, just know that not being in class may result in a loss of points.

## 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	_____	1000 points
Paper Three	_____	1000 points
Paper Four	_____	1000 points
Celebration 1	_____	2000 points
Presentation	_____	500 points
Participation	_____	1000 points max
Total	_____	7,500 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 [www.umt.edu/SA/VP/SA/index.cfm/page/1321](http://www.umt.edu/SA/VP/SA/index.cfm/page/1321).
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)	(406) 243-2243 (Voice/Text)
Lommasson Center 154	FAX 406-243-5330
The University of Montana	<a href="http://life.umt.edu/dss/">http://life.umt.edu/dss/</a>
Missoula, MT 59812	

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.

### **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

Jan 11 Intro Day

14,16	Introduction to Comm and Risk and Crisis
18	Chapter 1 Crisis
21	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
23,25	Chapter 2. Crisis theory and practice
28	Writing with Jake from Writing (TW&PSC)
30, <i>Feb 1</i>	Chapter 3 Lessons of effective crisis and online
4,6	Ch 4 – applications and cases
8	Paper #1 Due
11,13	Uncertainty and Management chapter 5
15	High Reliability and disaster
18	President's Day
20,22	Chapter 6 Cases
25,27	Leadership and Crisis
<i>March 1</i>	Paper #2
4,6	Renewal, Chapter 7
8,11,13	Paper 3 development and readings on renewal and disaster and learning
15	Review and Chapter 8
18	Celebration of Knowledge
20,22	Paper #3 Due and online development
25-29	Spring Break
April 1,3,5	Risk Communication chapter 10
8,10	Risk and more on risk – so much on risk
12	<i>Disaster and security response</i>
15,17,19	Chapter 9 Learning, Special Topics Paper #4 Due
22,24,26	Presentations
Final	Presentations Tuesday, April 30, 3:20-5:20 PM

