Course Title: Health Communications/Risk Communication
Course Number: HEBS 0678J
Course Location: School of Public Health, 683 Hoes Lane West, Piscataway, NJ
Course Date & Time: Tuesday 3:00 – 6:00 pm
Course Instructor: M. Jane Lewis, DrPH, Associate Professor

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Lindsey Toler, MPH, Teaching Assistant
lot5@sph.rutgers.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment Only


Other readings as assigned.

Assigned readings are listed in the course schedule and should be done prior to the lecture; this section lists major resources

Course Description: The purpose of this class is to familiarize students with health communication and special issues relating to the communication of health risk information.

Selected Department Competencies Addressed: Each Department identifies competencies for each degree offered. This course will reinforce the following competencies for the MPH for the Department of Health Education and Behavioral Science:
Course Objectives: By the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Define and discuss issues related to health communication;
- Describe how the media communicates risk-related information;
- Recognize and discuss media triggers and factors influencing media coverage;
- Discuss the principles of risk perception and perceptual biases and how they influence understanding of health and health behavior;
- Discuss the principles of risk communication and factors to consider when communicating health risk;
- Identify issues relating to working with communities regarding health risks;
- Discuss issues related to communicating data and other findings of health and science research to the public;
- Discuss social media options and their application to communicating health related information;
- Describe content analysis methodology
- Discuss the needs and biases of journalists and how to interact effectively with them
- Discuss media advocacy
- Discuss the health content and possible effects on health of entertainment television

Course Requirements and Grading:

Expectations

- Reading assignments should be completed prior to class meetings
- Regular attendance is encouraged and attendance will be considered when assigning the class participation grade.
- This course will adhere to all policies and procedures delineated in Rutgers-School of Public Health Student Handbook. “Failure to read the Student Handbook does not excuse a student from the requirements and regulations as described herein.”

Lateness: All work is due on the date assigned, and assignments turned in after the due dates are considered late. Unless we have come to an arrangement at least one week
before the assigned due date (or later, if it’s a bona fide crisis), your grade will be lowered for each day written work is late.

**Writing:** Written communication is an important tool of health education and behavioral science. Proofread your written assignments for typos and spelling and grammatical errors and correct these. Students who do not do so will see this reflected in their grades.

**References:** References should be in APA style. See [http://www.apastyle.org](http://www.apastyle.org)

**Topics, goals and objectives:** Choice of health issues for projects must be in line with *Healthy People 2020*.

**Moodle:** The syllabus, details of assignments, class readings not from assigned books or available on the internet will be on Moodle for download (unless otherwise distributed). Students are responsible for checking the site for details on assignments and downloading readings. In general, assignments should be submitted via PDF to Moodle by the date and time noted on the syllabus. In the case of group projects, only one team member needs to submit the report on Moodle, but be sure to include the names of all team members in the document so that everyone on the team is given credit.

Participation in class discussions and completion of assignments listed below is required.

**Class participation:** Class participation will be based on attendance and participation during classes (to include examples and discussion of health news).

**Health News:** Throughout the semester, the class will examine health-related information to which people are exposed through the media, including news and entertainment as well as advertising. Students will be assigned a specific week for which they are to bring examples and begin the discussion of these. When it is not your week, you are expected to contribute to the discussions (to be reflected in class participation grades).

**Reading Commentaries:** In order to demonstrate familiarity with the material and help guide the discussion, each student will submit double-spaced written commentary on readings in PDF form via Moodle no later than noon on the day of class. Readings for which commentaries are required will be noted on the syllabus. Unless noted, commentaries should cover all assigned readings for that week. *They should provide your reflections on the readings rather than summarize them. Describe one or more points that you found interesting, surprising, or perplexing in the readings and why.* Give an example of how they would apply to understanding of public health communications and/or public health issues. I need to see that you understand the concepts, so do not use examples from the readings or summarize them. These papers are informal and you do not need to cite work – if you refer to another reading, name the author. *Commentaries are due in PDF form by noon on the day of class.*

**Accuracy of News Accounts:** The class will be broken into groups of four. Each group will choose a journal article about a research study and a newspaper article that reports the findings of that research study. Students will need to read both of these and analyze
whether the newspaper article accurately reported the findings of the published study. A detailed guide will be distributed at a later date. Check with Lindsey Toler once you have made your selections.

**Midterm exam:** There will be an in-class midterm examination covering all of the material covered up to that point.

**Review of Content Analysis Published Research Due March 25 (group assignment):** Summarize and comment on the methodology and findings of the report of content analysis of media messages assigned to your group, based on points from the Babbe reading and specific requirements listed below. The paper should include the subject of the article’s research and what was analyzed (e.g., newspaper clippings on a particular topic, pharmaceutical advertising in particular magazines), the unit of analysis (e.g., whole magazines, individual ads), whether sampling was used and how the sample was selected, how data were collected, examples of codes utilized (and whether both manifest and latent content was coded), results, any other interesting points.

**Final Project:** Content Analysis Group Project - detailed assignment to be distributed

**Assignments and Points**

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<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<td>Analysis of one journal article and news items reporting it</td>
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<td>Reading commentaries</td>
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<td>Midterm</td>
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Class Sessions

Jan 20  Introductions, Course Overview

For next week: Be prepared to talk about recent and relevant news.

Jan 27  Health in the News

Readings due:

Assignment distributed: Accuracy of News Account (due Feb 10)
For next week: Group 1 bring examples of health–related news for discussion.

Feb 3  Introduction to Health Communication

Group 1 presents health-related news or media examples

Readings due:

Assignment due: Reading commentary 1 (PDF due to Moodle by noon)

For next week: Group 2 presents health-related news or media examples

Feb 10  Communicating Public Health Data and Risk/Perceptual Biases

Group 2 presents health-related news or media examples.

Readings due:
- Nelson, et.al Making Data Talk, Chapters 3 Overcoming General Audience Tendencies and Biases to Enhance Lay Understanding of Data, pp 73-110.
 Assignment due: Reading commentary 2 (PDF due to Moodle at noon)

For next week: Group 3 presents health-related news or media examples

Feb 17

**Communicating Public Health Data and Risk/Perceptual Biases continued**

Group 3 presents health-related news or media examples

Readings due:
- Nelson, et. al. *Making Data Talk*. Chapter 4 Presenting Data, pp. 120-159

Assignment due: Reading Commentary 3 (PDF due to Moodle at noon)

For next week: Group 4 presents health-related news or media examples

Feb 25

**Risk Communication - On Your Own**

Group 4 presents health-related news or media examples

Readings due:
- [http://www.nwcphp.org/training/opportunities/online-courses/emergency-risk-communication-for-public-health-professionals](http://www.nwcphp.org/training/opportunities/online-courses/emergency-risk-communication-for-public-health-professionals)

March 3

**Risk Communication, Intro to content analysis**

Readings due:
- TBD - Examples of published content analyses for review and presentation by groups to the class on March 25.

Assignment due: Reading Commentary 4 on Risk Communication training and readings (PDF due to Moodle at noon)

March 10

**Content Analysis**

March 17

**SPRING BREAK**
March 24  TBA and Content Analysis continued

Groups present details of their reviews of assigned content analyses articles

Readings due:  TBD

March 31  MIDTERM EXAM

April 7  Social Media

Reading due:
- The Health Communicator’s Social Media Toolkit CDC health marketing http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/Tools/guidelines/pdf/SocialMediaToolkit_BM.pdf

April 14  Advertising and Promotion

Readings due:  TBD


April 21  Media Advocacy and Relations

Readings due:

April 29  Content Analysis Project Class Presentations

May 6  Content Analysis Project Class Presentations

School of Public Health Honor Code: The School of Public Health Honor Code is found in the student bulletin (sph.rutgers.edu/academics/catalog/index.html ). Each student bears a fundamental responsibility for maintaining academic integrity and intellectual honesty in his or her graduate work. For example, all students are expected to observe the generally accepted principles of scholarly work, to submit their own rather than another’s work, to refrain from falsifying data, and to refrain from receiving and/or giving aid on examinations or other assigned work requiring independent effort. In submitting written material, the writer takes full responsibility for the work as a whole and implies that, except as
properly noted by use of quotation marks, footnotes, etc., both the ideas and the works used are his or her own. In addition to maintaining personal academic integrity, each student is expected to contribute to the academic integrity of the school community by not facilitating inappropriate use of her/his own work by others and by reporting acts of academic dishonesty by others to an appropriate school authority. It should be clearly understood that plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and can lead to sanctions up to and including separation from the Rutgers School of Public Health.

**Policy Concerning Use of Recording Devices and Other Electronic Communications Systems:**
When personally owned communication/recording devices are used by students to record lectures and/or classroom lessons, such use must be authorized by the faculty member or instructor who must give either oral or written permission prior to the start of the semester and identify restrictions, if any, on the use of mobile communication or recording devices.