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 2:00 – 5:00 pm

Course Instructor: Olivia Wackowski, PhD, MPH, Assistant Professor

SPH Office: Room 314, 3rd Floor
Phone: (732) 235-9731
wackowol@sph.rutgers.edu (Preferred and best way to contact)

Mary Ganss, HEBS secretary
ganssme@sph.rutgers.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment


Other readings as assigned available by email or on Moodle

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:

- Assess and delineate health education and promotion needs of diverse populations using a variety of techniques;
- Design, implement, conduct and evaluate programs in diverse settings based upon social, psychological, and educational theories utilized in health education and promotion programming;
- Develop and critique health education materials, methods and programs;
- Conduct behavioral science research
- Please visit the Department webpages on the School of Public Health’s website at http://sph.rutgers.edu/ for additional competencies addressed by this course for other degrees and departments.
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.

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.

Assignments and Points

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; Class participation</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>News Accuracy Assignment</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading commentaries</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Analysis Article Presentation</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Analysis Project</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** Students are expected to arrive promptly and attend every class. **Attendance is especially important since our meetings are double periods, so missing one class is really like missing two.** Classes missed will result in points deducted from the Attendance portion of your grade. Late arrivals will also affect the Attendance portion of the grade. In the event of an emergency or illness requiring you to miss class, let me know by email (wackowol@sph.rutgers.edu) prior to class or as soon as possible afterwards. If you miss class, contact a classmate to arrange pick up of any handouts, class notes, and other updates promptly. Each student is also encouraged to **participate** fully in all class discussions, especially in discussions related to the readings, lecture notes and class activities. You can actively participate in class by responding to the Professor's questions during lecture ("can anyone remember what we said agenda setting refers to?"), sharing examples of health/risk communication materials/news stories you encountered, and asking thoughtful questions as they may arise. As a seminar class we will also spend time discussing the readings. A lack of class participation may negatively impact your grade. Clearly if you do not attend class, you will also miss opportunities to participate.

Throughout the semester, the class will examine health-related information to which people are exposed through the media, including the news. 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).

**News Accuracy Assignment:** You will complete an assignment comparing the way in which a news article reported about a research study with what was said in the actual published study itself. Assignment details will be provided.
Reading Commentaries: In order to demonstrate familiarity with the material and help guide the discussion, each student will submit 3 written commentaries on the dates noted in the syllabus based on the readings due 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 simply summarize them. These papers are informal and you do not need to cite work – if you refer to another reading, name the author. These commentaries will be used to direct and promote class discussion, so please be prepared to discuss the issues addressed in your assignment.

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: In order to provide the class with multiple examples of content analysis studies to inform your final project, each student be assigned one content analysis research article that they will be responsible for describing to the class in a 10 minute PowerPoint presentation. The presentation should summarize and comment on the methodology and findings of the study, 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, and any other interesting points.

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

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.
Class Sessions
Jan 17 Introductions, Course Overview, Intro to Media effects
Readings due:

Jan 24 Introduction to Health Communication, Intro to Content Analysis
Readings due:

Jan 31 Communicating Public Health Data and Risk/Perceptual Biases
Readings due:
• Nelson, et.al Making Data Talk. Chapters 3, Overcoming General Audience Tendencies and Biases to Enhace Lay Understanding of Data, pp 73-110.
• Jeffrey RW. Risk Behaviors and Health: Contrasting Individual and Population Perspectives.(1989) American Psychologist 44(9):1194-1196
• Weinstein ND. What does it mean to understand a risk: Evaluating Risk Comprehension (1999). Journal of the National Cancer Institute Monograph

Assignments due:
• Group 1 presents content analysis studies.
• Reading commentary 1

Feb 7 Health in the News
Readings due:

Assignments due:
• Group 2 presents content analysis studies.
Feb 14  Communicating Public Health Data and Risk/Perceptual Biases continued
Guest speaker: Danny Giovenco, PhD, Columbia University

Readings due:
- Nelson, et.al. Making Data Talk. Chapter 4 Presenting Data, p120-159

Assignments due:
- Group 1 presents health-related news examples.
- Group 3 presents content analysis studies.
- Reading Commentary 2

Feb 21  Crisis Communication - On Your Own (no class meeting)

Readings due:
- http://www.nwphp.org/training/opportunities/online-courses/emergency-risk-communication-for-public-health-professionals

Feb 28  Risk/Crisis Communication, Continued

Readings due:

Assignments due:
- Group 2 presents health-related news examples.

March 7  Content Analysis Workshop, Other Topics TBD
Guest Speaker: Stacy Davis, Ph.D.

Readings due: TBD
Assignments due:
- News Accuracy Assignment
- Group 3 presents health-related news examples.

March 14  SPRING BREAK

March 21  No Class – Webinar TBD
Reading due:
- Nelson, et. al., Making Data Talk Chap 5, Putting it all together. p 168.
March 28  MIDTERM EXAM

April 4  Communicating Data for Program Advocacy/Media Advocacy

Reading due:
• Nelson, et. al., Making Data Talk, Chap 7.  pp 262.

Assignments due:
• Group 1 presents health-related news examples.

April 11  Social Media, Entertainment Education, Guest Lectures

Readings due:
• The Health Communicator’s Social Media Toolkit CDC health marketing

• Others, TBD

Assignments due:
• Group 2 presents health-related news examples.

April 18  Guest Lecturer, Suzanne Miro, Sr. Health Communication Specialist,
  NJ Department of Health

Readings due: TBD

Assignments due:
• Group 3 presents health-related news examples.

April 25  Topics in Tobacco Communication
  (Advertising, Campaigns, Risk Perceptions, Warnings and Regulation)

Readings due: TBD

Assignment due: Reading Commentary 3

May 3  Content Analysis Project Final Class Presentations