

SPPH 581S – Risk and Communication in Public Health (3 credits)

Thursdays 12:00 – 3:00, SPPH 143

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Gardy, jennifer.gardy@bccdc.ca. Office hours: by request.

Course Objectives: In SPPH 581S, students will be introduced to the principles of science communication as well as the theory and practice of risk communication in public health. The ultimate goal of the course is to provide students with practical experience in crafting clear, concise, and appropriate public health messages for a range of audiences, and specific course objectives include: improve practical communication skills, including writing and visual communication; understand the Hazard vs. Outrage framework for risk communication, identify which quadrant best describes the audience for a given exercise in communication, and select and use the right tools to reach each type of audience; and, through case studies, analyze real-world examples of successful and unsuccessful public health communication.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Recognize the importance of science communication and the challenges associated with effective communication
- Understand and employ the principles underlying effective scientific writing
- Understand how concepts from the field of information visualization can be applied to communicate scientific and health information visually
- Explore how to communicate health information in creative, non-traditional ways
- Determine how the technical aspects of a risk and the public's perception of that risk influence how we design and deliver risk communication messages
- Utilize different health behavior change frameworks and models to create public health communication plans
- Design a public health communication intervention for a specific target audience

Course Format: SPPH 581S meets weekly for an interactive lecture/discussion section. Readings and slides will be made available in advance of the week's lecture via the course's Connect site, and each lecture will combine an instructor-led discussion of the material with small group work focused on practical use of the concepts from the week's lecture.

Course Requirements: No prerequisites.

Assessment, Evaluation, and Grading: SPPH 581S is graded on a percentage basis and includes five assignments and a participation mark. There are no examinations in the course. A breakdown of the evaluation is provided below:

Assignment	Value
1 – Writing: You will select a specific audience and, using a press release from eurekaalert.org , write a one-page document explaining the content of the press release to the audience of your choice. Use the principles for effective science writing and understanding audiences discussed in class to make your document clear, concise, and interesting.	10 marks
2 – Slide design: You will be provided with a deck of PowerPoint slides that have been poorly designed. Choose one of the slides in the deck and give it a	10 marks

makeover using the principles discussed in class around presenting data visually and designing effective slides.	
3 – Creative communication: You will create a one-page pitch document describing a creative way to communicate a science or health topic of your choosing – don't be afraid to go way outside the box!	10 marks
4 – Public perceptions assessment: Using the principles established by Peter Sandman's Hazard vs. Outrage framework, you will select a public health topic and a specific audience of your choosing and describe their baseline perception of the issue. You may choose to assess this in any way you like - decide on your ratings yourself, poll a friend, try to get a sense of the landscape through public postings on the internet, etc.	20 marks
5 – Intervention design: The final assignment in the course will integrate everything discussed in the course. You will draft a health communication-style plan describing an intervention that you hope will move an audience of your choice towards a change in belief or behaviour. Some of the questions you might want to address include: Who is my audience? What do I know about them and how to reach them? What stage of a behaviour change framework are they at? Where do I want them to be? What are my messages? What materials do I need to develop? How can I track the success of my intervention?	40 marks
Participation: Your participation in the class (regular attendance, active participation in discussions, asking questions) will be evaluated by the instructor.	10 marks

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1	No class (Semiahmoo conference)
Week 2	Why do we communicate science
Week 3	Understanding audiences (writing sample feedback week)
Week 4	Narrative and science writing (Assignment #1 issued)
Week 5	Science on screen (Assignment #1 due)
Week 6	Communicating visually and creatively (Assignment #2 & #3 issued)
Week 7	No class – Midterm break
Week 8	Social media and working with the media (Assignment #2 & #3 due)
Week 9	Risk communication: Talking about risk, Hazard vs. Outrage Framework I
Week 10	Risk communication: Hazard vs. Outrage Framework II
Week 11	New models in public health communication (Assignment #5 issued)
Week 12	Behaviour change frameworks & intervention case study
Week 13	Developing communications plans & communication case study
Week 14	TBD