DETAILED COURSE DESCRIPTION

COURSE DEFINITION

EST 388: Psychological Principles of Risk Communication

Instructor: B.J. Nordenstam, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies

Course Format: 3 hours of lecture and discussion per week

Pre-requisite: Upper division status

SCOPE

Level of Instruction

Upper division

Content

Presents socio-psychological principles and theories guiding the applied social science approach to environmental risk communication issues. The course views environmental risk analysis as practiced within a context of social and cultural values, leading to differing perceptions, rankings of risks, and challenges in effective risk communication. Three overlapping themes will be considered and linked: how communities cope with environmental hazards, how risk information is cognitively processed and evaluated, and how risk communication influences perception, evaluation and behavior. Students critique relevant theories, and utilize case studies and interactive role-playing while identifying and assessing barriers to risk awareness, beliefs, and behavior. Major conceptual areas include:

Theory - Understand and critically evaluate the psychological bases for perception, interpretation, and communication of environmental risks.

Policy - Identify and evaluate relevant policies and regulations associated with environmental risk information, communication, and education efforts.

Management - Design and evaluate effective risk communication programs based on hypothetical or historical environmental threats to improve risk management approaches.

Relation to other ESF or Syracuse University courses

The course is offered within the Environmental Studies degree program, but is open to all undergraduate students with upper division status.
OBJECTIVES

Through full and active participation in the course, successful students will attain basic competency in three areas of focus relevant to environmental risk perception and communication:

1. Develop an understanding of how social and cultural values shape perceptions and communication of environmental risks;

2. Develop a detailed understanding of several specific environmental risk topics through careful study and discussion of course materials as well as through written assignments;

3. Develop and apply critical thinking to emerging issues in environmental risk communication.

INSTRUCTIONAL FORMAT AND MATERIALS

Format

Each week this course will involve 3 hours of in-class activities including lecture, critical thinking, discussion, policy analysis, case-study review, and small-group role-playing. Reading, writing, and other assignments are to be completed by students outside of class.

Materials

Students are required to purchase or access assigned texts, journal articles, and other materials needed for the class. Students also are expected to view and have access to Internet-based resources either on or off campus. Duplication of approximately 100 pages per student is necessary to provide relevant handouts and other educational materials throughout the course.

INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES REQUIRED (INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT)

To provide an appropriate and effective learning environment, the following resources are required:

Classroom to accommodate approximately 10 undergraduate students
Chalkboard or dry-erase board
VCR and monitor/TV
Overhead projector
Projection screen
HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Conditions or situations present in association with the course?

Will substances with any of the following properties be used during instruction: flammability, toxicity, corrosivity, reactivity, registered pesticide, legally controlled, or other characteristics with the potential to cause harm or injury? NO

Will any physical hazards be present during instruction? (e.g., machines that need safety guards; razor blades or syringes; compressed gases, etc.) NO

Will any biological hazards be present during instruction? (e.g., handling animals (rabies or hantavirus); cultures or stocks of infectious agents (fungal spores, viruses, bacteria, etc.) NO

Will any radiation hazards be present during instruction? (e.g., radioisotopes, X-rays, ultraviolet rays, lasers, etc.) NO

Will any electrical equipment that, due to design, location, or method of use, pose any threat to safety during instruction? (Give considerable thought to electrical use outdoors, or any potentially wet location.) NO

Will there be any personal safety issues related to the class? (e.g., due to time of day or location, at the end of any organized class exercise, will students be in danger of physical assault, etc.) NO

Will any students be driving official State or research sponsored land or water vehicles during any class or instructional exercise? NO

Will any personal protective equipment be necessary during class exercises? (e.g., hard-hats, eye/face protection, hearing protection, hand/foot protection, lab coat, visibility clothing, etc.) NO

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

EST 388 Psychological Principles of Risk Communication 3 Credit Hours

Presents socio-psychological principles and theoretical underpinnings guiding the applied social science approach to environmental risk communication issues. Three overlapping themes will be considered and linked: how communities cope with environmental hazards, how risk information is cognitively processed and evaluated, and how risk communication influences perception, evaluation and behavior. Spring, even years.

Pre-requisite: Upper division status
COURSE HISTORY

EST 388, Psychological Principles of Risk Communication, is a new course.

ENS 606 Environmental Risk Perception: Implications for Communication and Policy presents some fundamental concepts introduced in EST 388 in much greater detail and complexity for the graduate level student.

Last revised: 3/19/2004