

Geog: 90020: Risk Management and Public Participation

SUBJECT COORDINATOR

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BACKGROUND

This subject will provide students with the skills needed to examine, analyse, and report on risk management and public participation. The subject addresses the primary challenge of risk management, which involves determining what stakeholders want, analysing how they interpret risks, and understanding how their knowledge shapes behaviour. Added to this very complex topic is the question of how governments can attempt reshape that behaviour.

The subject will require that students decide whether – or to what degree – they believe in public participation. This is a problem with no ‘right’ answer, and so students will be free to advocate ‘complete public empowerment’, ‘tokenistic manipulation’, or some combination, or a context-dependant approach. Regardless of their beliefs or intent, students will be expected to consider their approach and to be able to justify the way(s) they interpret Risk Management & Public Participation.

The subject will review the history of academic risk research from a social science perspective, drawing together literature from Geography, Sociology, Engineering, Psychology, Economics, and the Sciences. It will integrate risk research with studies of public engagement, paying particular attention to public knowledge and to the management of complex socio-ecological problems. As often as possible, the subject will allow students to apply the lessons and arguments from class to issues of their choosing; the assessments, as well, will endeavour to offer students the opportunity to integrate their interests with the subject themes.

The subject is organised and will be delivered around weekly sessions. These three-hour blocks will be divided into tutorial, application, and lecture portions. The tutorial will revolve around questions supplied by students on the basis of the reading; these questions must be emailed to brian.cook@unimelb.edu.au by 11:59PM on the Monday before the associated lecture. The application portion will often involve guest speakers and will emphasise ‘real world’ application of the weekly theme. Finally, the lecture portion will present additional or alternate interpretations of the theme and provide an opportunity for broader commentary and connection to the over-arching subject objective (see Figure 1).

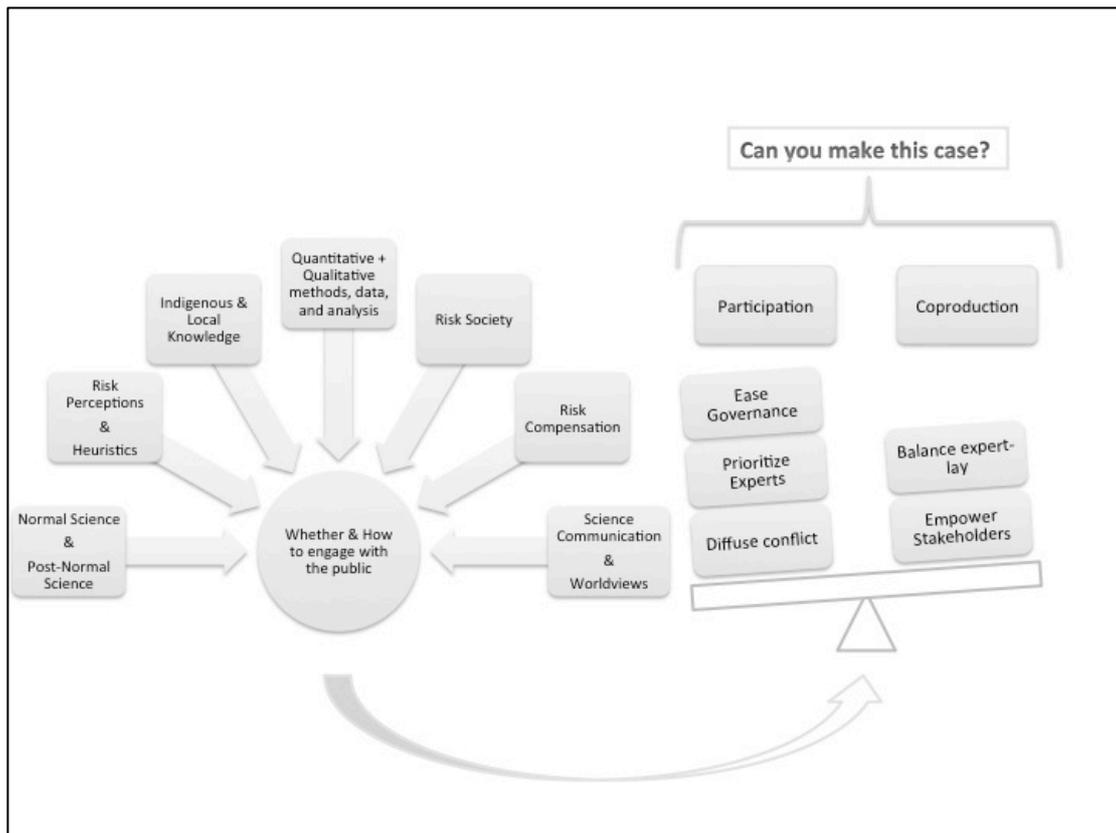


Figure 1: Visualisation of the subject themes (roughly aligning with weeks of instruction) and their purpose.

While there are no prerequisites, a familiarity with the risk literature will be beneficial. Students interested in Risk Management are encouraged to undertake Risk Analysis (ENVS90014) if they have wider interests in such research. **If in need or curious, see below for suggested readings.**

ASSESSMENT

1. Book Review (20% of final grade): in the second week of class, students will be required to review one of 4 classic risk texts. This 900 word review will provide students with a foundation in risk management and/or public participation – should students wish to propose alternate texts they must be given approval from the coordinator. The guidelines for the book review will follow those common to academic journals (details in class and on the LMS). In the week following return of marked book reviews, we will discuss and debate the relevance of the books (and the associated arguments or concepts) to the subject.

2. Discussion Participation (worth 20% of final grade): each week, each student will contribute to a tutorial discussion. They will be responsible for reading the assigned text, and for developing a question for the group, which will be sent to the coordinator the night before class (**Mondays by 11:59pm, or sooner**). Students will be assessed for the quality of their question, its connection to the theme and subject, and for their contribution to discussions following questions from other students.

3. Short essay (worth 20% of the final grade): Approximately at the mid-term, students will produce a short essay on an assigned topic (900 words). In 'bullet point form', this document will show how students would prepare and plan for their final exam essay; it will show their argument, rationale, and sources.

4. Final Take Home Essay (worth 40% of the final grade): This 1800 word final assessment will explore a risk management and public participation topic. It will require concise, clear writing and analysis. Students will have the option of using their empirical research (i.e., from their Masters work) should they wish. Topic and methodology will be chosen by the student, but in consultation and subject to the approval of the subject coordinator. This will be due following the SWOT vac.

All submissions subject to late penalties of 10% per day.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUBJECT OBJECTIVES

Knowledge: Graduates of this subject will have:

- a body of knowledge that includes both a theoretical and applied understanding of recent developments in risk management and public participation, with explicit linkages to professional practice;
- knowledge of research principles and methods applicable to the numerous disciplines engaged in risk-related research, but also the opportunity to develop and establish a disciplinary foundation;

Skills: Graduates of this subject will have:

- cognitive skills to demonstrate mastery of theoretical knowledge and to reflect critically on theory and professional practice or scholarship relating to risk management and public participation;
- cognitive, technical, and creative skills to investigate, analyse and synthesise complex information, problems, concepts, and theories and to apply established theories to different challenges associated with risk;
- cognitive, technical, and creative skills to generate and evaluate complex ideas and concepts at an abstract level;
- communication and technical research skills to justify and interpret theoretical propositions, methodologies, conclusions, and professional decisions to specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- technical and communication skills to design, evaluate, implement, analyse, and theorise about developments that contribute to professional practice or scholarship;

Application of knowledge: Graduates of this subject will demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills:

- with creativity towards new situations in professional practice and/or for further learning;
- with a high level personal autonomy and accountability;
- to plan and execute a substantial research-based project and/or piece of scholarship.

PREPARATORY READINGS

McCall and Peters-Guarin (2012) Participatory action research and disaster risk. In *The Routledge handbook of disaster risk reduction* (eds.) Wisner, Gaillard, and Kelman. Routledge: Oxon.

Kearnes, M., Klauser, F., and Lane, S. (2012) Introduction: Risk Research after Fukushima. In *Critical risk research: practices, politics and ethics*. Wiley-Blackwell: Sussex.

Jasanoff, S. (2004) The idiom of co-production. In *States of Knowledge: The Co-production of Science and the Social Order*. (ed.) Jasanoff. New York, Routledge.

Wynne, B. (1996) Misunderstood misunderstandings: social identities and public uptake of science. In *Misunderstanding Science: the public reconstruction of science and technology*. (eds. Irwin and Wynne). Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Thorpe, C. (2008) Political theory in science and technology studies. In *The handbook of science and technology studies 3rd*. (eds.) Hackett, Amsterdamska, Lynch, and Wajcman. MIT Press: USA.

MARKING SCHEME

The marking scheme for this subject is available on the LMS. Please refer to this document prior to your assessments as it makes explicit what is expected and how students will be assessed.

Plagiarism:

Please read University policy on plagiarism, <http://academichonesty.unimelb.edu.au/>
It will be treated very seriously (heads on spikes, seriously).

Classic Risk texts for book review:

- Beck, U. (1992 [1986]), *Risk Society: towards a new modernity*, London, Sage.
- Perrow, C. (2011), *Normal accidents: Living with high risk technologies*, New Jersey, USA, Princeton University Press.
- Wisner, B., Blaikie, P., Cannon, T. & Davis, I. (2004), *At risk: natural hazards, people's vulnerability and disasters*, New York, Routledge 2nd ed.
- Birkland, T. A. (2006), *Lessons of disaster: Policy change after catastrophic events*, Washington D.C., USA, Georgetown University Press.

And a bonus!

- Adams, J. (1995), *Risk*, Abingdon, Routledge.