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 to 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 context-dependent 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 offer students the ability to integrate their interests with the themes of the subject.

The subject is organised and will be delivered around a weekly session. These three-hour blocks will be divided into tutorial, application, and lecture portions. The tutorial portion will, for each student once during the term, require a presentation and group activity in which students will be expected to apply their learning and be critical of the topics being presented (see assessment below for details). 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).
While there are no prerequisites, a basic familiarity with the risk literature will be beneficial. Students are advised to undertake Risk Analysis (ENVS90014) if they have wider interests in risk research. **If in need or curious, see below for suggested readings.**

**ASSESSMENT**

1. **Book Review**: in the second week of class, students will be required to review one of 3 classic risk texts (worth 30% of final grade). This 1000 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. **Presentation & Participation**: each student (in groups depending on the numbers) will be required to lead an activity and discussion once per term (worth 20% of final grade). This (40 minute) presentation, which will involve an activity of the student’s choice, will allow students to develop, present, and lead discussion and debate exploring the topic of the week. Like the co-ordinator, students will be expected to upload their slides and materials in advance of class.
The presentations will be allocated during the first class of the term. In order to reward those who volunteer to present early in the term, every presentation is required to link the theme (and reading) to the subject. This means that with each passing week, the task of relating the presentation to the subject gets more complicated. This should not be a difficult task, though it will certainly be easier in week 3 than in week 11. More importantly, relating the reading to the subject as a whole is essential, and will be a key part of the assessment criteria.

The presentations represent a commitment by students to take responsibility for a topic, and to ensure that their colleagues understand – and have an opportunity to apply the concept. Similarly, the class shares in the commitment to learning; being an audience member is not a passive activity, but an active one that is worth 10% of the final mark. Students will be assessed on their level of engagement (i.e. have they done the readings) through the quality of their contributions (i.e. questions and participation during activities), and in their reflection on the session (through their constructive feedback to the presenter(s)).

3. Essay on Research Topic of Student’s choosing: This 2000 word final assessment (worth 40% of the final grade) will explore a risk management and public participation topic of the student’s choice. 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 one week following the SWOT vac.

It is a hurdle requirement that students attend 9 out of 12 weeks of tutorials (or 75% of classes). Attendance will be taken using constructive feedback to student presenters.

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**


**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/](http://academichonesty.unimelb.edu.au/)
It will be treated very seriously (heads on spikes, seriously).
**Weekly Themes and Outlines**

## Week 1: Risk Management & Public Participation

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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Learning Objective</th>
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<tr>
<td>Discussions</td>
<td>We will assign the weekly presentations and assign teams/pairs if needed. We will also discuss the book review assignment and I will answer any questions concerning which books are best suited to student interests and fields of study or work. We will also explain and outline the intent of the subject; this includes both the views of the subject co-ordinator, but of students as well. This will be the most important point for requesting particular topics or themes.</td>
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| Desired Outcome | We will have clear expectations and a common understanding of the assessments, requirements. My goal will be for each student to understand what they need to do to do excel in the subject. We will also provide students with a foundation on which to base the remainder of the subject. The main message will be that the current approach to risk and risk management is in tension with the emergence and support for stakeholder participation or empowerment. We will contrast the need to make decisions in the context of risk, and the reality of a public that has grown intransigent in response to ‘normal’ governance. |

## Week 2: Risk research, risk management, and the ‘problem’ of the public

**Reading(s):**


**Learning Objective**

Review how socio-ecological problems are understood; how they are managed. To understand why risk problems differ from what is expected, why they challenge ‘traditional governance models’, and why they tend to cause problems for managers.
Discuss Normal and Post-Normal science

Understand the concept of post-normal science. Discuss the applicability of this critique to risk management and (the desire for) public participation.

**Desired Outcome**

The second week will establish that some problems (i.e. socio-ecological) are impossible to manage following standard models of governance. We will explore how uncertainty and complexity undermine a tendency to rely on scientific expertise, and how public resistance has resulted in calls for stakeholder involvement. Overall, we will help students to situate and understand the dominant risk paradigm, and thereby understand its strengths and weaknesses. It will show how there is a near-universal turn towards public participation, but that this raises difficult challenges, which the class will explore.

We will explore discussions of post-normal as a way of distinguishing problems for which there is 'no technical solution'.

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**Week 3: Risk Perceptions & Heuristics**

**Reading(s):**


**Guiding Question**

Become familiar with perception-based research and the challenges associated with analyses of heuristics. There are many behaviours and responses to stimuli that challenge notions of rationality and *Homo-Economicus*. To understand and engage/manipulate the public requires an understanding of such common tendencies. If people respond in predictable ways, how can this be used to shape risk management and public participation?

**Desired Outcome**

Week 3 will explore analyses of risk perception. Overall, students will gain an understanding of public perception of risk, of the claim that risks are growing and/or becoming more central to modern life, and of approaches used to understand and predict human behaviour. At the same time, students will see learn about the difficulties that arise as a result of such approaches.
### Week 4: Public, lay, indigenous, and non-certified expertise

**Reading(s):**


**Guiding Question**

If expert knowledge is not the 'arbiter of Truth', then how to proceed? How to deal with non-certified expertise, lay, and informal knowledge. How to proceed when anecdote and (clearly) inaccurate claims are incorporated into worldviews and arguments?

**Desired Outcome**

Week 4 will build on the move towards increased public/stakeholder engagement within the wider governance of socio-ecological challenges. Students will gain an understanding of debates over expert-lay, traditional, indigenous, and non-certified expertise. They will have to determine their own position on the relevance of such knowledge in a modern context and if/how that knowledge can be incorporated into contemporary risk management.

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### Week 5: Quantitative and Qualitative methods, data, and analysis

**Reading(s):**


**Guiding Question**

One of the most challenging and inhibiting issue associated with risk management and public participation is making sense of the world through mixed-yet-flawed methods. Risk is so complex, material, subjective, and dynamic that there are countless ways of analysing and ‘making sense’ of the chaos – how then to draw together multiple ways of knowing? What then, following that mess, is implied for governance and engagement with the public?

**Desired Outcome**

Students will be required to familiarise themselves with several methods used to explore and analyse ‘risk’. There are countless, and many of them are irreconcilable, raising complicated and fraught decisions in terms of going about research or making sense of the
### Week 6: Experts and Expertise

**Reading(s):**


**Guiding Question**

The debate over expertise and the public is often couched as an ‘all or nothing’ proposition. Collins and Evans propose a ‘middle ground’ interpretation in which ‘expert’ and ‘expertise’ are more clearly defined and delineated. It is a long paper, but well worth the effort. It will help us explore the question of boundaries and boundary making and whether a ‘compromise’ is possible between governors and the governed?

**Desired Outcome**

Students who disagree with public participation, or who conclude it is impractical, inconsistent, or too resource intensive may want a compromise. Collins and Evans offer an interpretation that may be of use to such efforts. For others, this will help them explore the hubris of risk management, exploring a critique that emerged in response to colonialism, but which has been embraced by knowledgeable, developed world publics.

### Week 7: Risk Society and Risk Compensation

**Reading(s):**


**Guiding Questions**

Is the world becoming more ‘risky’, does it matter if people believe that it is? Are people’s behaviours shaped by perceptions of risk – whether consciously or unconsciously? Are we in a post-modernity, in which the production of wealth (as the key driver of society) has been replaced by wealth-risk?

**Desired Outcome**

Week 7 will present, and ask students to consider Beck’s ‘Risk Society’ thesis, and to contemplate its usefulness in the context of risk management and public perception. Overall, students will gain an
understanding of risk and society (or risk-society), and of the claim that risks are growing, and/or becoming more central to modern life.

We will challenge students to consider the tensions (and potential impossibilities) within risk research and management. Adams’ seminal research has shown the impossibility of many standard approaches to risk and risk management, which will be used to challenge preconceptions and to inform the development of their take home essay topic.

**Week 8: Science Communication**

**Reading(s):**


**Guiding Question**

Why won’t people do what they are told? It’s a strange but important question; think of the idiom ‘you can take a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink’ in that there are times when you can advise people of something that is a benefit to them, but that they will still often ignore that advice. Why?

**Desired Outcome**

We will explore ‘science communication’ as a method of informing the public. We will see that it is – far and away – the dominant way in which most experts envision their engagements with the public: we’ll also see why it fails.

**Week 9: Participation**

**Reading(s):**


**Guiding question(s)**

Arnstein’s paper is a seminal commentary on the nature(s) of participation, constructing
A typology that – in many unsettling ways – challenges people to consider whether their understanding of participation is anything more than a tokenistic placation?

| Desired Outcome | Week 9 will transition towards the more practical and applied portion of the subject. In this week we will discuss the nature of participation, paying particular attention to ‘how’ participation can be implemented. The discussion will be divided into background and theoretical discussion, followed by practical engagement. |

**Week 10: Coproduction**

**Reading(s)**


**Guiding Questions**

Coproduction is the most recent iteration of ‘participation’, emphasizing a progression towards meaningful power-sharing. It is, though, an ideal that cannot be realised, raising questions about whether it is useful to advocate (or attempt) methods that are inapplicable in all but the most contrived settings?

| Desired Outcome | Students will contemplate whether they think meaningful participation is ideal, possible, or desirable. They will also need to consider their approach to the final essay, and how they will interpret and engage with the notion of coproduction. |

**Week 11: Participation Practice**

**Reading(s)**


**Guiding Questions**

Hay and Crang offer a logic and explanation for the growing use of participatory techniques involved in the social sciences. They provide examples and useful arguments for the use of techniques such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews.
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<th>Guest Lecture</th>
<th>There will be a guest lecture to discuss participatory techniques and experiences.</th>
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<td>Desired Outcome</td>
<td>Students will learn interview skills from researchers and practitioners.</td>
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<th>Week 12: Review and preparation for the final essay</th>
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<td><strong>Review</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Desired Outcome</strong></td>
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