

Public Health Communications

Fall 2026 Syllabus

Course Information

Public Health Communications (COMH 5320) is a course that is fully online.

Course description

This course is designed to familiarize students with the history and current applications of health communication theory and strategies to public health practice and research. This course examines how to structure, develop and evaluate social marketing, media advocacy, risk communication and advocacy skills for change. In addition, systematic qualitative data collection processes such as interviewing skills, participant observation and focus groups will be developed. Emphasis is placed on critical thinking skills to help students analyze and utilize these skills in research and practice.

Instructor Information

Dr. Thresa Byrd, DrPH	Theresa.byrd@uttyler.edu OR tbyrdprof@gmail.com
Online office hours by appointment Regular online office hours will be held	(915) 253-4989 (cell)

Course Objectives

As a result of this course, you will gain skills in utilizing theories and models in health promotion and behavior change. Additionally, you will hear from content experts and explore relevant examples to apply the content learned throughout the course.

CEPH Competency	Assessment
14. Advocate for political, social, or economic policies and programs that will improve health in diverse populations.	Fact Sheet: Create a one-page, evidence-based fact sheet advocating for a specific political, social, or economic policy or program that will improve health outcomes for a diverse or underserved population, tailored to a defined policymaker or decision-making audience.
18. Select communication strategies for different audiences and sectors	Discussion Board: Design a discussion post in which you select a public health issue and describe how you would tailor communication strategies for two distinct audiences from different sectors, explaining your approach and engaging with peers' ideas
19. Communicate audience-appropriate public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation to a non-academic, non-peer audience with attention to factors such as literacy and health literacy	Project: <i>Empowering Health Communication: A Social Media Campaign Project</i> . Develop and implement a comprehensive social media campaign on a chosen public health issue, applying audience insights and strategic communication to promote awareness and behavior change.

20. Describe the importance of cultural humility in communicating public health content	Discussion Board: Reflect on the importance of cultural humility in public health communication by defining it, applying it to a specific health message for a chosen community, and analyzing how it shapes message delivery and engagement.

Course Materials

Public Health Communication: Critical Tools and Strategies First Edition by Claudia Parvanta (Author), David E. Nelson (Author), Richard N. Harner (Author). ISBN: 978-1284065947

Additional required readings will be provided on the learning management system.

Course Assessment/Assignments

Quizzes: Throughout the semester, I will post 5 quizzes to be completed within a week.

Discussion boards: For this class, discussion boards will be used to review the course content.

Midterm & Final Exam: Midterm exam will cover chapters 1-9 and final exam will cover chapters 10-17.

Project 1: Empowering Health Communication: A Social Media Campaign Project

Overview: The "Empowering Health Communication" project aims to equip graduate students with the knowledge and skills necessary to design effective public health communication campaigns using social media platforms. Students will select a public health issue of their choice and develop a comprehensive campaign addressing the issue. Through this project, students will gain practical experience in identifying target audiences, understanding audience perceptions and values, developing strategies based on audience insights, and selecting appropriate channels for dissemination. By engaging in the "Empowering Health Communication" project, graduate students will develop valuable skills in health promotion, audience engagement, and social media marketing while making a meaningful contribution to public health awareness and behavior change efforts.

Fact Sheet: Create a one-page, evidence-based fact sheet advocating for a specific political, social, or economic policy or program that will improve health outcomes for a diverse or underserved population, tailored to a defined policymaker or decision-making audience.

Extra credit: Throughout the semester, opportunities for extra credit will be given. Be on the lookout for posts on your modules.

Grading Scale

Assignment	% Of Grade
Discussion Boards	10%
Quizzes	10%
Fact Sheet	10%
Midterm	25%
Final Exam	25%
Project	20%

Class Policies

Course Policies:

Communications: Students are responsible for monitoring Canvas Announcements, postings to the Canvas Inbox, and email on a frequent basis. The Patriot account should be used as the primary email account.

Late Work Policy: Assignments are expected to be submitted by the specified deadline. Late submissions will incur the following penalties:

- 1 day late: 10% deduction from the total possible points.
- 2-3 days late: 20% deduction from the total possible points.
- More than 3 days late: Assignments will not be accepted, and a grade of zero will be recorded.

Exceptions to this policy will only be made under extenuating circumstances, such as a documented medical emergency or other significant life events. In such cases, students must notify the instructor as soon as possible to discuss potential accommodations.

Makeup Exam Policy: Makeup exams are generally not offered except in cases of documented emergencies or university-approved absences. If you know in advance that you will miss an exam due to an approved reason, please notify the instructor at least one week prior to the exam to arrange a makeup.

In the event of an emergency on the day of the exam, you must contact the instructor within 24 hours to discuss your situation. Documentation will be required to support your request for a makeup exam.

Please note that makeup exams may differ in format from the original exam and must be completed within one week of the original exam date unless otherwise arranged with the instructor.

Note: The Instructor retains the right to change this syllabus.



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Week/Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
1: 8/24	Introduction to Public Health Communication Population Health: A Primer	Chapters 1 & 2	Quiz 1
2: 8/31	A Public Health Communication Planning Framework	Chapter 3	Discussion Board 1
3: 9/7	How to Communicate about Data Understanding and Reporting the Science	Chapter 4 & 5	Quiz 2
4: 9/14	Communicating for Policy and Advocacy	Chapter 6	Discussion Board 2
5: 9/21	Health Literacy and Clear Health Communication	Chapters 7	Quiz 3
6: 9/28	Behavior Change Communication: Theories, Models, and Practice Strategies Formative Research	Chapter 8 & 9	Discussion board 3
7: 10/5	Midterm Exam		
8: 10/12	Media Vehicles, Platforms, and Channels	Chapter 10	Quiz 4
9: 10/19	Implementing a Communication Intervention	Chapters 11	Discussion board 4
10: 10/26	Evaluating a Health Communication Program	Chapter 12	Quiz 5
11: 11/2	Clinician-Patient Communication The Role of Communication in Cancer Prevention and Care	Chapter 13 & 14	Discussion board 5
12: 11/9	Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Health Communication in Resource-Poor Counties	Chapters 15 & 16	
13: 11/16	Fact Sheet		
11/23	Thanksgiving Week		
14: 11/30	Project Due		
15: 12/7	Final Exam		
12/15	Grades are due		