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Final Semester Reflection

The last few weeks of the semester were equal parts informative, stressful, and engaging. The oral reports and writing troikas helped me to continue thinking through my final project. This was beneficial because everyone’s projects approaches risk communication differently. There are different angles targets in terms of risk, and risk communication. These different understandings of key concepts discussed throughout the semester proved interesting because despite the class reading the same materials each person has gone off in a different direction. I found this exciting because we’ve all been exposed to, and/or engaged or grappled with the same theories or applications, but chose to work with them in many different areas. It seems we’re all making an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice in some way.

At this point my readings for the class have centered on my final project. This paper keeps taking me in different directions. My current anxiety stems from the various research areas of each source. My goal is to present information that explains what influences and informs my analysis. I want the different sources to be an indication of the many areas to research in regards to risk communication while also capturing the many factors that influence this type of communication. My biggest concern is that this makes sense in my head from an organizational standpoint, but won’t be easy to follow for my audience. I’m also currently having issues with my introduction. Do I introduce the drought in California, or do I discuss rhetoric first? Who is my audience here? Do I take the approach of trying to encourage the public to become more civically engaged because this issue impacts them? If so, how does that change my introduction and overall writing style? Is it possible to do that with an academic audience as my grader? I keep telling myself to focus on the practice, and not the product. The most exciting part about this process has been reading sources that cover different areas of risk communication, and risk analysis in one article, and connecting them to the commercial I plan to analyze. Reading about risk communication, and seeing it real life by way of the artifacts analyzed in class is one thing, but putting together the knowledge gained in class, and sources that I found to help write this paper is a different experience. I find myself more and more thinking about everything that goes in to communicating in this way, and how a rhetorician, or scientist, or expert, etc. can possibly take all of this into account and reach an audience in a timely matter. Isn’t urgency implied in risk communication?

Per usual, at the end of the semester I find myself with more questions than answers. While there is no formula to effectively compose these messages, but one thing is clear and that’s the fact that before you can ever think to reach an audience and communicate a risk you have to listen and observe the audience you want to reach.