

Alex Jacob

Prof. Saenz

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Risk Communication

Throughout this semester, so far, the communication factor of RIT's COVID semester has changed. Before the semester beginning, the mood was more hopeful and optimistic about the outcome and hard work that the institution has provided to avoid the virus. The institution's communication had begun to fall apart during the semester, with the given results slightly. The competence and trustworthiness of the RIT community were put to the test with this pandemic. Nobody knew what to do nor what to expect. Our expectations of any source's honesty or concern were up for debate.

Before the semester, the institution had frequently promoted individual credibility and factors leading to different degrees of concern about this hazard upon us. Their words stated that the students' arrival to the campus would be entirely voluntary and within their control as the courses had begun to shift online. They were open to admit that this was an uncertain and unfamiliar time for everyone. However, they always provided some form of positivity and organization. These mainly included the informative emails that were sent out and the information on daily health screening. The emails that were sent out contained clear and concise information with cited sources. These are all attributes from Figure 12.2 and Figure 12.3 from *Business and Professional Communication*. Figure 12.2 says that the more "in control" you are of a situation, the fewer concern people will have with the situation. From Figure 12.3, the more positive attributes are held, the higher credibility the institution will have. RIT was sure to give

us a similar perception of the situation, as this is the first time this is happening. This concept was prominent in most of the information given to the students. Nearly every email about this topic was about keeping our hopes up and ensuring that we were knowledgeable of the situation through organized and relatively objective content.

Although there have been similar positive attributions and factors as before, there is more uncertainty among the students; more students are feeling dread in these unfamiliar times. Their words shifted from what seemed like a pleasant utopia to a very real-world situation.

Unfortunately, there will be people who do not follow the rules and regulations of what is meant to help us. Another different aspect is that currently, the data is being more closed rather than open. The newer and worse data can only be found by reading between the lines and

sugarcoating. This is represented by Figure 12.4 from *Business and Professional*

Communication. The more positive factors that are attained, the better for the communication.

Unfortunately, RIT has become more conflict stifled as the results become inevitably worse.

However, throughout the semester, RIT had also admitted uncertainty at various times when unexpected results arose. This brought some positive factors of credibility to RIT. This also allowed RIT to make the situation feel fairer for everyone with tighter restrictions about social distancing and mask-wearing. Another difference was the implementation of the online ordering of food to the students. This allowed fewer students to gather in large places and possibly spread the disease further. Although this might not have been their calculated intention from the start, it helped bring ease to the community.

There are some ways to assist communication. The better form of communication happened before the semester started. RIT was significantly more open about what was happening, which brought more faith and less concern to the students on campus. However, their

most significant flaw was allowing more students to be on campus when the guest policy was more restricted. This brought a rise in cases, increased restrictions, and also brought unease to the student community. The situation only became worse while people tried to keep a positive mentality of what was happening. This, unfortunately, brought the credibility of RIT down when they intended to bring ease to the community. Another change that could be made is to keep providing more accurate and up-to-date information on what is happening on campus with the cases. Even if the results are not the best, this will show a higher familiarity with the situation.

Regardless of the outcome of this semester, RIT has put in their effort to keep their student community as safe and calm as possible with the information they gave. Before the semester started, RIT sent continuous objective emails about what will happen on campus with the new restrictions of social distancing and mask-wearing. Although these concepts would have worked well in theory, there is always a way that everything can get ruined. RIT then implemented online ordering of food, allowed the community to gather less in crowded areas, and bring comfort and ease to those on campus. Although their risk communication could have been better with a few minor tweaks, the information they conveyed was mostly enough to keep us as safe as they could.