

Crisis Communications - PUR4400C – Summer A

Professor: Dr. Myiah Hutchens

Course Time: Asynchronous

Location: Canvas

Office Hours: Virtual office hours are held online via Zoom by scheduled appointment, if you are in Gainesville, I'm happy to meet in person as well (Weimer 2085)

Email: myiahhutchens@ufl.edu (this is generally the quickest way to get a response)

Phone: 352-273-1220

**This syllabus is subject to change as the professor deems appropriate and necessary. All changes will be sent via Canvas announcements and posted on our Canvas page.*

Prerequisite:

PUR 3000 Principles of Public Relations

Readings

Required Text:

W. Timothy Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications ISBN: 9781544331959

Additional Readings as Assigned

Students will be expected to be regular readers of free updates from PRWeek Daily Breakfast Briefing. PRWeek is accessible to UF students through the UF George A. Smathers Libraries online database system. The professor will provide or assign additional reading materials (e.g., media articles or book chapters) over the course of the semester, mostly for additional information but, in some cases, these may be included in the quizzes.

Course Goals

Crisis Communications focuses on key elements of crisis and issues management – before, during and after a crisis. In an age when a company's every move is subject to instant, vivid, unfiltered, and global scrutiny and attack, the need for effective, proactive crisis management is greater than ever. And it is far more challenging, especially as communication technology is constantly expanding, amid multiple global crises. The structure of the course will reflect the crisis management process: pre-crisis (prevention, preparation, planning); crisis response (crisis communications and stakeholder engagement during the critical period); and post crisis (lessons learned, corrective actions and reputation recovery). Emphasis will be placed on practical application of crisis communications theory, with copious use of real-life case studies and guest lectures by top expert practitioners. A fictitious crisis will be presented to the class with the expectation of utilizing the principles and techniques learned in class to develop a correct response and plan.

Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- Learn what constitutes a crisis – how it is distinct from day-to-day issues

- Develop a crisis preparedness plan and vulnerabilities assessment
- Understand how to assemble and manage a crisis management team
- Understand the typical stages of a crisis, and how social media affects the dynamics
- Identify and address the ethical issues presented by different crisis situations
- Write a crisis communications plan, including a core set of strategic messages for each key stakeholder group
- As a communications professional, how to prepare for a crisis
- Develop a post-crisis plan, which includes learnings for the organization and proof points for stakeholders on corrective actions

College of Journalism and Communications Objectives

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that by graduation all students should be able to:

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences, and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style, and grammatical correctness.
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work

KEY COURSE POLICIES

Online Course Administration — e-Learning in Canvas

<https://elearning.ufl.edu> will be used to administer the course communication, materials (e.g., PowerPoint files, additional readings, handouts, assignment guidelines, evaluation forms), and grades. For instance, an electronic file of this document is posted on Canvas. You can access the site by using your GatorLink username and password. Please check the site for announcements and/or threads of comments from classmates, and the professor.

Instructor Interaction

Please feel free to stop by my office or make an appointment to see me. The best way to reach me is by e-mail. I check my e-mail account regularly, but please do not expect a response by e-mail after normal business hours/over the weekend. If I have not written back within 48 hours, please send your email again. As my email is considered a state public record, I do not discuss grades or any student records issues via e-mail. Please schedule a meeting with me to discuss these issues. The classroom is typically not an appropriate place for these discussions.

Late or Missed Work

All written assignments must be turned in to Canvas by 11:59pm the day the assignment is due. Canvas will automatically mark assignments as late if they are uploaded even one second after 11:59pm. You have 24 hours after the due date to turn in your assignment for a 25% grade reduction, after that no late work is accepted. It is your responsibility to make sure you properly uploaded your paper.

Course Professionalism

The College of Journalism and Communications is a professional school and professional decorum is expected at all times. Therefore, the students, and the professor, adhere to workplace norms for collegial and respectful interaction. Carefully consider how you participate in class discussions and in the assignment you submit and present. You can use humor and demonstrate creativity but think ahead to how it will reflect on you. Use your best professional judgment. Projects should not contain nudity, profanity, illegal activities, or situations that would put you or others in danger. Students are expected to show up on time, not leave early unless prior permission is granted, and wait for the class to end before leaving. This applies to both in-person and Zoom classes. *Please note the significant impact of attendance and active participation in your final grade (25% of grade) and be sure to show up and speak up.*

Students are expected to conduct themselves in an honest, ethical, and courteous manner — with classmates and the professor.

AI Policy for Student Work

In this class I want you to produce all your own work without generative AI's assistance. It is important for me to be able to ascertain what you know and can produce unaided on your own. The use of generative AI for your assignments in this class is a violation of the honor code as you are presenting content as your own that was not fully created by you. There are various AI detection tools available (built within Canvas and externally such as ZeroGPT), and many AI platforms follow very formulaic response patterns. If I am concerned that your work is not your own, I will try to verify the originality of your work and if evidence is found that your work is AI generated I will submit your assignment as violating the honor code.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." [The Honor Code](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore,

you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with me.

I will document and report all honor code violations, including cheating and plagiarism. The minimum penalty for a violation of the honor code is a zero on the assignment or exam, but may be higher depending on the severity of the violation.

Diversity Statement

Your experience in this class is important to me. I embrace a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along several dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, socio-economic class, disability, age, and religion. It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as resource, strength, and benefit. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for others.

Course Grades

Assignments will be graded and feedback given within 7 days after the due date.

ASIGNMENT GROUPS WEIGHT

Assignment Percentage of Grade	
In-module activities	25%
Individual Case Study	35%
Quiz #1	20%
Quiz #2	20%

Weekly Activities/In Module Assignments: 25%

I am a firm believer that the best way to learn how to do something is to practice doing it. To that effect, we will have activities and short assignments embedded into most modules.

Case Study: 35%

For this assignment, you will have to prepare a case study on a specific company’s handling of a crisis. You will select the organization and the case (subject to the instructor’s approval); it must be a case in which social media was or could have been a factor. The project will have a written and video presentation element.

The grade will be based on: how compelling is the situation and its impact on the organization; a comprehensive analysis of how the organization engaged with primary and secondary stakeholders through direct engagement, media relations, and social media interaction; effectiveness of the case organization’s preparation, response and recovery; suggested improvements to the case organization’s courses of action throughout the crisis; how well the

student uses logic and understands the principles of effective crisis communications.

Quizzes - 40%

You will have two quizzes each covering approximately half of the course. Quizzes are timed to 45 minutes and must be completed in a single setting. They will be open for a 48 hour period to accommodate individual schedule constraints.

Grading for the course follows current UF grading policies for assigning grade points (see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>).

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A = 93.0-100%.

A- = 90.0-92.99%.

B+ = 87.0-89.99%.

B = 83.0-86.99%.

B- = 80.0-82.99%.

C+ = 77.0-79.99%.

C = 74.0-76.99%.

C- = 70.0-73.99%.

D+ = 67.0-69.99%.

D = 64.0-66.99%.

D- = 60.0-63.99%.

E = below 60%

Further information about grades and grading policy may be found at this [link to the university grades and grading policies](#).

Course Schedule

Module	Topic, Reading	Complete By
1	Introduction	Week 1, Tuesday
2	General Crisis Knowledge, Ch. 1	Week 1, Friday
3	How Organizations Recognize Crisis, Ch. 6	Week 2, Tuesday
4	Ongoing Crisis Comms, Ch. 3	Week 2, Friday
5	Leadership in Crisis Comms, Ch. 4	Week 3, Tuesday
6	Crisis Prep, Ch. 5, Quiz #1 open Monday-Tuesday of Wk4	Week 3, Friday
7	Social Media, Ch. 2	Week 4, Tuesday
8	Recognizing a Crisis, Ch. 6	Week 4, Friday
9	Crisis Responding, Ch. 7	Week 5, Tuesday
10	International Terrorism	Week 5, Friday
11	Post Crisis, Ch. 8	Week 6, Tuesday
12	Quiz #2 open Thursday-Friday, Case Study due	Week 6, Friday

Standard UF Policy Information and Links

UF Grading Policy

<http://gradcatalog.ufl.edu/content.php?catoid=10&navoid=2020#grades> (Links to an external site.)

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (Links to an external site.)

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals> (Links to an external site.). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/> (Links to an external site.).

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Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see: <http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog0910/policies/regulationferpa.html> (Links to an external site.)

In-Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Policy on Course Syllabi 3 UF, Academic Affairs, July 28th, 2021 Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

[Campus Resources](#)

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care:

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc> ([Links to an external site.](#)), and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)

Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

University Police Department at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or <http://www.police.ufl.edu/> ([Links to an external site.](#)).

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml> (Links to an external site.).

Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <https://www.crc.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.).

Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask> (Links to an external site.). Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.).

Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> (Links to an external site.).

Student Complaints

Campus: https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf (Links to an external site.).

On-Line Students Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process> (Links to an external site.).