College of Journalism and Communications
UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA

SPRING 2025

PUR4400C.29097 Crisis Communications *(☼)*

CLASSES – M 4:05-7:00 p.m. (Online)

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Office hours: By appointment

Zoom login information available on Canvas

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Course Overview

This course will focus 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 crisis management is greater than ever. And it is far more challenging. This course will reflect the crisis management process: prevention, preparation, response and long-term impact. Emphasis will be placed on the practical application of crisis communications theory, with copious use of real-life case studies and guest lectures by top crisis expert practitioners.

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 vulnerability assessment
* Understand the typical stages of a crisis, and how they are changing in the social media era
* Learn to define the crisis and identify the stakeholders most affected by it
* Identify and address the ethical issues presented by the crisis
* Write a crisis communications plan, including a core set of strategic messages for each key stakeholder group (e.g., employees, customers, government officials, key opinion leaders, community leaders, etc.)

Prerequisite: PUR 3000 Principles of Public Relations

Learning Outcomes

The course specifically supports six of the 11 professional values and competencies required of graduates by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC):
   o Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to mass communications
   o Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information
   o Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles, and work ethically.
   o Think critically, creatively and independently
   o Conduct research and evaluate information by appropriate methods
   o Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve

Required Readings

Required Book
W. T. Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (6th ed.). Copyright 2023 by Sage Publications ISBN: 9781071816646 (Paperback) (available online at Amazon and other sites)

Additional Readings as Assigned

Students will be expected to be regular readers of business news, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Financial Times*, *Reuters News, Bloomberg* and other respected business news sources.

In addition, students will be expected to read trade publications and sites that cover aspects of the PR business, such as the following: PRWeek, the Holmes Report, IPR Research Letter, O'Dwyer's Daily, PR News, AdAge Daily, and Adweek.

Online Course Administration

We will use e-Learning on Canvas (http://elearning.ufl.edu/) 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.

Assignments

Note: Assignments must be submitted on Canvas in PDF format.

Individual Assignments

Case Study Paper and Presentation

> **Due Dates:**
> - **Submission of Topic for Approval Due: January 17, by 11:59 pm**
> - **Paper Submission Due: March 2, by 11:59 pm**
> - **Class Presentation Due: March 3, in class**

This individual assignment will provide you an opportunity to explore a past crisis in a case study.

You will develop a complete case study on a past crisis (i.e., one in which the crisis phase is deemed to be over, and the post-crisis phase is underway or completed). It must be from the social media era, preferably the past 10-15 years. You will select the crisis (subject to professor's approval) and assess the crisis from the organization's perspective.

The paper should be approximately 10-15 pages, double-spaced.

Pick a topic for which you can develop a good analysis based on publicly available information and/or input from the company or agency involved.

No duplicate case studies will be permitted, so please choose and inform the professor via the assignment on Canvas ASAP. Assignments will be made on a first come, first served basis, so the earlier you submit, the better your chances of getting your first-choice case.

You will submit the topic of your case study for professor approval **via an assignment on Canvas by Friday, January 17 at 11:59 pm.**

The case study paper is due **via an assignment on Canvas on Sunday, March 2, by 11:59 pm.**

In addition, you will make a short presentation in class to provide an overview of the case study. Presentation slides are required. Presentations should be no more than 10 minutes and include no more than five slides. Slides do not need to be submitted. **Presentations will take place in class on Monday, March 3.**

Quizzes

> • **Feb. 24, in class**
> • **April 28, in class**

Two quizzes will be held during the regularly scheduled class periods. Quizzes are designed to test the student's knowledge of the main ideas covered in the readings, guest lectures and class discussions.

Quizzes will be open-book and open-note. The first quiz will cover material from the first half of the semester. The second quiz will cover material from the second half of the semester.

Attendance and Active Participation

Attendance and active participation in the class are expected. Timely completion of all course requirements, active class participation and regular attendance contribute to your final grade. There are 14 classes during the semester, and you can receive up to 10 points per class for participation for a total of 140 points. Please notify the professor in advance if you expect to miss classes.

Active participation means coming to class prepared, contributing to class discussions and chats and returning assignments on time.
   • Active participation means cameras are on and you participate actively in group discussions.
   • While you can earn 10 points per class, you are not guaranteed 10 points for being there.
   • You will lose points if you are very late, if your camera is off for all or most of the class or if you do not participate in the discussions.

This class is interactive, and we will be learning together. All views are needed and welcome. No perspective is irrelevant or unimportant. If you feel uncomfortable participating in the class discussions and groups, please contact me to discuss.

Group Assignments

Crisis Group Project (CGP): Paper and Presentation

Due Dates:
- **Crisis Group Project Preference Survey, Due Friday, Jan. 17, by 11:59 pm**
- **Select organization for CGP, Due Friday, February 21, by 11:59 pm**
- **CPG Presentation and Paper Submission, Due Apr. 20, by 11:59 pm**
- **CPG Presentations, Apr. 21, in class**

This is a semester-long group project that will require you to work together to write a crisis communication plan. Your group will be the crisis management team for an organization of your choosing. You will develop a crisis communication plan to prepare your chosen organization for a potential crisis based on the learnings from a past crisis this organization (or a competitor of this organization) has previously faced.

Task #1: Crisis Group Project (CGP) Preference Survey
Due: Friday, January 17, 11:59 pm

In professional situations, you do not always get to choose who you work with, and you will not get to choose your group for this assignment.

- I will assign the groups, but you will have an opportunity to express your interest in a sector. I have laid out five sectors for you to consider. You will rank your interest in each sector using the provided in the assignment on Brightspace. Rank your top choice #1 and your last choice as #5.
- Based on these selections, I will assign teams of three to five people. You are strongly encouraged to choose a sector with which you are familiar or in which you are naturally interested. This makes the team assignment journey much more enjoyable.
- **The link to the Google Form can be found on Canvas under the assignment. Completion is due on Friday, January 17 at 11:59 pm.** If you do not fill out the form, you will be assigned randomly to a group.

Task #2: Select organization to for CGP
Due Friday, February 21, 11:59 pm

Your team is to choose the organization you will work on. As your team selects an organization, consider the following criteria:
- The organization can be a for-profit company or a non-profit organization.
  - If it is a for-profit entity, it should be a public company
  - If it is a non-profit/advocacy organization, it should be a global organization, meaning it operates in more than just the U.S.
  - All organizations must be approved by the professor.
- Identify a crisis in the past 5-10 years that this organization or an industry peer has gone through. As examples (for illustration only):

- You could decide to develop a crisis communication plan for Chevron to be ready for a crisis like BP's oil spill
- You could decide to develop a crisis communication plan for American Airlines to be ready for a crisis like Spirit Airlines' bankruptcy announcement and fallout.
- The group selection is due via an assignment on Canvas on **Friday, February 21, by 11:59 pm.** The professor must approve the selection.

Task #3: Develop a Crisis Management Plan (Written Paper)
Due: Sunday, April 20, by 11:59 pm
- The team will study the crisis to understand how the crisis was handled to identify what was done well and room for improvement.
- Based on what you observe in the crisis and what we learn in class, the team will develop a detailed outline of the content you would expect to put in a crisis management plan to prepare your organization for a crisis.
- You will build out the crisis communication portion of that plan in detail – strategy, templates and contact lists. Include sample materials for the crisis plan. We will review this in more detail in class.
- The crisis plan should be a written document. However, your team will also present the crisis management plan to the class (see next task for more information).
- Submit the written plan and the slides for your presentation via the assignment on Canvas. Due Date: Sunday, April 20, by 11:59 pm.

Task #4: Crisis Management Plan Presentation
Due: <u>Submission</u> Due April 20, 11:59 pm and <u>Presentation</u> in class on Monday, April 21
- Each group will present their projects in class on April 21.
- Prepare a presentation that will summarize the crisis that inspired the need for a crisis management plan. You can use PowerPoint, Canva, Keynote or any other presentation tool you wish.
- You will go through the crisis plan and share the key messages your developed and the sample materials
- You will walk us through lessons learned from the crisis and the exercise of making a plan
- You will walk us through what your crisis plan sought to correct, augment or change
- Your presentations should be submitted on Canvas by Sunday, April 20, 11:59 pm. No changes to presentations will be accepted after that time.

Grading

The evaluation of coursework will be based on the student's performance in four major areas, each of which constitutes a proportion of the final grade. These include quizzes, one individual analysis of a case presentation, one group experiential learning project, and weekly attendance and active participation. The area and allocations for each are as follows:

Case Study Paper:	30%
Group Crisis Planning Paper and Presentation:	30%
Mid-term Quiz	15%

Final Quizzes	15%
Individual: Active Participation	10%

Letter grades for this course will be based on the total points earned over the term. For further information about grades and grading policy, please consult:
https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx

The grading scale for the course is as follows:

A 94-100%	B- 80-83%	D+ 67-69%
A- 90-93%	C+ 77-79%	D 64-66%
B+ 87-90%	C 74-76%	D- 61-63%
B 84-86%	C- 70-73%	F below 61%

Grading policy for Group Projects:

One grade will be provided for the group, but I reserve the right to change that policy if I feel that everyone in the group is not contributing. I will issue a survey to allow each group to share insights on how the group worked together.

If there are problems in the group, I encourage you to reach out to me early to see if we can address the issue

Attendance and Extension Policy

Attendance
Attendance is mandatory. After due warning, I may prohibit further attendance and subsequently assign a lower or failing grade for excessive absences; more than two absences during the semester will be considered "excessive absences." For further information on attendance policy, please consult: https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/

Make-Up Quizzes
If you miss a quiz, you will receive a grade of zero for that quiz. Documented exceptions for extreme circumstances will be considered and should be discussed with the professor before any missed quiz. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/

Students arriving more than 10 minutes late to a quiz will not be allowed to take the quiz.

Late Assignments and Extensions
Assignments are provided on this syllabus with due dates throughout the semester. An assignment turned in past the deadline will be penalized one letter grade for each weekday it is late. Communications/Public Relations is a business where deadlines matter. Managers and clients won't accept excuses if your work is late. If you cannot meet a deadline, please contact me in advance of the due date to discuss. I will not discuss extensions once the due date has passed.

Plagiarism and Use of Artificial Intelligence Policy

Plagiarism: This course requires original work, created by you at this time, for this purpose. Do not submit the same work to more than one class without prior written permission from both professors. Do not adapt work from another class for this class without my prior written permission. Do not adapt someone else's work and submit it as your own. Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an "F" for the course and possible disciplinary action.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Do not submit work generated primarily through artificial intelligence (AI) tools. AI is here to stay, and we need to learn to work with it. If students use AI to help generate a first draft or brainstorm an idea, that is acceptable if the final submission is developed by the student. If generative AI was used, the student should provide a log of prompts used to develop the draft as part of referencing. I will use tools to detect whether submitted work is plagiarized or primarily generated using an AI tool like ChatGPT, Google Bard or other AI tool.

Ignorance is not an acceptable excuse for unacceptable practices. For the record, if you violate the precepts of academic integrity you will receive a zero for the assignment and your name will be forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students, where a notation will become part of your file.

Course Professionalism

The College of Journalism and Communications is a professional school and professional decorum is always expected. Therefore, the students, and the professor will adhere to workplace norms for collegial and respectful interaction. Students are expected to arrive on time fully prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Students are expected to not leave early unless prior permission is granted, and wait for the class to end before leaving.

Assignments are provided on this syllabus with due dates throughout the semester. An assignment turned in past the deadline will be penalized one letter grade for each weekday it is late. Public Relations is a business where deadlines count. Managers and clients won't accept excuses if your work is late.

Spelling counts. So do grammar, punctuation and professional presentation techniques. Misspelling your client or agency name during exercises will result in a letter grade deduction. Check your work!

Our class discussions may involve topics that are potentially divisive and controversial. We will not debate or take positions on these issues. We will limit our discussion to how communication of these topics should be managed in a crisis.

Further, students are expected to conduct themselves in an honest, ethical, and courteous manner — with classmates, and the professor. In an online class, being present is important. Please keep cameras on. Chatting while the professor, or another student is talking is unacceptable behavior. Please consider that there is sometimes a delay with video calls. I will make every effort to ensure that everyone's voice is heard, but please be conscious of not speaking over each other.

Cell phones and other electronic devices must not be used during class and turned off completely during class. In the event of an emergency, notify the professor at the start of class. Laptops may be used for notetaking. Surfing the Internet, checking or sending email, playing games, and other online activities not related to class are strictly prohibited.

End of Course Evaluations

Students are requested to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals. 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/).

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, and 352 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 352 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

- **Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)**
  Student Health Care Center, 352 392-1161.

- **University Police Department** at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or http://www.police.ufl.edu/.

Academic Resources

- **E-learning technical suppor***t*, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail Learning-support@ufl.edu. https://elearning.ufl.edu/student-help/

- **Career Connections Center**, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. https://career.ufl.edu/

- **Library Support**, http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask. 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/.

- **Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall**, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/

- **On-Line Students Complaints**: http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, https://disability.ufl.edu/ 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.

Other Important Notes

- The professor reserves the right to make changes, if necessary, to the grading system, schedule, or other matters about the class.

- The professor may also be reached via email, but please be aware that the professor will not be able to respond immediately to your communication. As a rule, allow up to 48 hours for a response. Therefore, barring an emergency, it is advisable to contact the professor well in advance of a quiz or a deadline to give the professor adequate time to respond.

- Students are not permitted to bring guests to class unless special arrangements have been made with the professor before class.

- If you notice yourself having trouble in the course, contact the professor immediately. Please feel free to approach the professor about any concerns or comments you might have about this class. I will be happy to meet with you by appointment.

- In addition to the required and recommended readings, you are expected to maintain comprehensive class notes because class lectures often contain information not in the readings. You will be quizzed on this information.

Weekly Topic Schedule Spring 2025

Class Date	Readings for that Class
Monday, January 13	Course Introduction and overview Ch. 1 Crisis communications theory Read: Coombs, Ch.1 Crisis communications theory Assignment: Preferences for Group Projects Due Friday, Jan. 17, 11:59 pm
Monday, January 20	**MLK DAY NO CLASS**
Monday, January 27	Topic: Writing a Case Study Topic: Understanding Risk for Crisis Management Read: Coombs, Ch. 2 Assignment: Topic for Case Study Due Friday, January 31, 11:59 pm
Monday, February 3	Topic: The Risk Mitigation Process Read: Coombs Ch. 3
Monday, February 10	Topic: Crisis Simulation Exercise (Scott Farrell) Topic: Vulnerability Exercise
Monday, February 17	Topic: Crisis preparedness Read: Coombs Ch. 4-5 Topic: Crisis Group Project (CGP) Assignment: CGP Topic Due, Feb. 21, 11:59 pm
Monday, February 24	Topic: Crisis preparedness (continued) Read: Coombs Ch. 4-5 Assignment: Quiz 1
Monday, March 3	Topic: Crisis preparedness (continued) Read: Coombs Ch. 4-5 Discuss: CGP: Groups, roles & responsibilities Assignment: Case Study Paper Due, March 2, 11:59 pm IRL: Bri Nurick
Monday, March 10	Assignment: Case Study Presentations

March 15-23	**SPRING BREAK NO CLASS**
Monday, March 24	Assignment: Case Study Presentations (f needed) Topic: Crisis preparedness (continued) Read: Coombs Ch. 4-5
Monday, March 31	Topic: Recognizing Crisis Read: Coombs Ch. 6
Monday, April 7	Topic: Managing the post-crisis challenges and opportunities Topic: Crisis Responding (continued) Topic: Postcrisis concerns Read: Coombs, Ch. 7 and 8
Monday, April 14	**NO LIVE CLASS - Workday for CGP**
Monday, April 21	Assignment: CGP presentations Assignment: CGP presentation and paper submission due, Sunday, April 20, 11:59 pm
Monday, April 28	Assignment: Quiz 2

Summary of Key Due Dates (Submissions due by 11:59 pm on date listed

- **Jan. 17** – Fill out survey about team preference projects
- **Jan. 31 –** Topic for individual case study due
- **Feb. 21** – CGP Topic Due
- **Feb. 24** – Quiz 1
- **Mar. 02** – Individual Case Study Paper Due
- **Mar. 10** – Individual Case Study Presentations
- **Apr. 20** – CGP Presentation and Paper Submissions Due
- **Apr**. **21** – CGP Presentations
- **Apr**. **28** – Quiz 2