

December 21, 2024

Spring 2025 Syllabus: Crisis Communications (☀) PUR4400C (19423)

Professor: Patrick Ford, Professional-in-Residence, Department of Public Relations

Course Time: M 10:40 a.m. – 12:35 p.m.; W 11:45 a.m. – 12:35 p.m.

Location: Weimer 2050

Office Hours*: Tue 1:00-2:00 p.m.; Wed 3:00- 4:00 p.m.*

* *Appointments recommended and may also be possible outside office hours.*

Contact Information: Email (fordp@ufl.edu); phone or text (703-966-8138)

Teaching Assistant: Krisha Sanghavi (krishasanghavi@ufl.edu)

Messages via Canvas are accepted.

(☀) *This syllabus is subject to change as the professor deems appropriate and necessary.*

Course Description

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 in 2025, amid multiple global crises, political and cultural polarization, and increased risks from new technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence. The structure of the course will reflect the crisis management process: precrisis (prevention, preparation, planning); crisis response (crisis communications and stakeholder engagement during the critical period); and postcrisis (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. We have also scheduled multiple crisis simulation exercises.

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 they are changing in the social media era
- Identify and address the ethical issues presented by crisis situations
- Write a crisis communications plan, including a core set of strategic messages for each key stakeholder group (e.g., employees, customers, shareholders, suppliers, community leaders, government officials, key opinion leaders, etc.)
- Understand the importance of opinion/attitudinal research in crisis management
- Develop a post-crisis plan, which includes learnings for the corporation and proof points for stakeholders on corrective actions to prevent a recurrence of the crisis

Prerequisite:

- PUR 3000 Principles of Public Relations

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

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

Readings

Required Books

- W. Timothy Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (6th ed.). Copyright 2023 by Sage Publications ISBN: 9781071816646 (paperback)
- Chris Komisarjevsky, *Reputation First: Building a Crisis Communication Strategy* (3rd ed.). Copyright 2024 (complimentary copies available for students in this course – no purchase of this book will be necessary).

Additional Readings as Assigned

The professor will provide or assign additional reading materials (e.g., media articles or book chapters) over the course of the semester. Generally, assigned reading (book chapters or other articles) in the syllabus **should be read in advance of the class for which they are listed.**

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.

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 assignments 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 be present for in-person classes -- or logged into Zoom for virtual classes – promptly at the starting time. *Please note the significant impact of attendance and active participation in your final grade (25% of grade) and be sure to show up on time and be engaged throughout class.*
- Students are expected to conduct themselves in an honest, ethical, and courteous manner — with classmates and the professor.

Special 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, socioeconomic 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 a resource, strength, and benefit. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for others.

Course Grades

The evaluation of coursework will be based on the student's performance in key areas, each of which constitutes a percentage of the final grade.

Attendance 10%

- Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences during the semester will cause a reduction in attendance and participation credit. In the event of an illness or other emergencies, you are responsible for notifying the instructor prior to missing class or as soon as possible afterwards in an emergency. Requirements for assignments and other work in this course follow UF policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Active Participation: 15%

- Active participation in class discussion is required to gain full points; your physical presence is not in itself enough. To receive full credit, you must demonstrate active engagement, which means arriving on time, staying for the full class, activating your camera when we are on Zoom, and being prepared to make comments or ask questions as appropriate.

Individual Assignment / Case Study 25%

- Individual assignments will provide an opportunity for you to explore various aspects of crisis and corporate reputation management. The most important will be to prepare a case study on a specific organization's handling of a crisis. You will select the company or institution and the case (subject to the professor's approval). Full details on this individual case study project will be provided early in the semester. Other individual projects may be assigned during the semester.

Quizzes: 25%

- Two quizzes will be scheduled. These will be designed to test the students' understanding of key concepts of crisis communication addressed in the course textbook and discussed in class by the professor and/or guest lecturers.

Group Project and Presentation: 25%

- This group project will require you to work collaboratively with fellow students to develop a comprehensive case study of a consequential crisis for which enough information is publicly available to allow for detailed description and analysis of the company's reputation before the event; the nature and impact of the cause of the crisis; identification of key primary and secondary stakeholders and analysis of how successfully the company engaged with them; the impact of media and social media in causing and/or exacerbating the crisis; and the post-crisis steps the company took to recover from the crisis, to persuade stakeholders they would avoid recurrence of the crisis, and to fully or partially restore the company's reputation. Directions and team assignments will be provided early in the semester.

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](#).

Online Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals.

Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from

GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

The Honor Pledge

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. [Click here to read the Honor Code](#). 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 the instructor or TA in this class.

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness Resources

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).
- *University Police Department*: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

Academic Resources

- *E-learning technical support*: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- *Career Connections Center*: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- *Library Support*: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- *Teaching Center*: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
- *Writing Studio*: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

- *Student Complaints On-Campus:* [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.](#)
- *On-Line Students Complaints:* [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.](#)

Policy on Recording Classes

- 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 Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Other Important Notes from the Professor

- 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.**
- I can be reached via email (fordp@ufl.edu) or by telephone or text (703-966-8138). While I always strive to respond in a timely way, please be aware that I may not always be able to respond immediately to your communication. As a rule, allow up to 24 hours for a response.
- Students are not permitted to bring guests to class unless pre-arranged with Professor Ford or TA Krishna Sanghavi in advance.
- If you notice yourself having trouble in the course, it is crucial that you see me immediately or as soon as possible. Please feel free to approach me about any concerns or comments you might have about this class. Ideally, every student in the class should plan to have at least one 1:1 meeting with me during the semester (see office hours schedule above) – I can meet with you during office hours or at other times, but I ask that you reach out in advance and schedule an appointment.
- Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an “E” for the course and possible disciplinary action.
- 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. This course requires original work, created at this time, for this purpose.
- Spelling counts, as do grammar, punctuation, and professional presentation techniques. If you need extra help with presentation skills, arrange an appointment with me.
- An assignment turned in past the deadline without prior approval for an extension **will be penalized for each weekday it is late.**

- In addition to the required and recommended readings, you are expected to maintain comprehensive class notes because class lectures often contain information that is not contained in the readings. You may be quizzed on this information. *If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get briefed by another student on the content covered in the class.*

Course Schedule

- Detailed course schedule to be provided during first week of classes.