

# PUR 4932: CRISIS COMMUNICATION

## Course Syllabus – Study Abroad, FRANCE, SummerC 2009

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### CLASS OBJECTIVES & READINGS

**Purpose & Course Description.** This course will be an introduction to crisis communication theory and application. We will cover crisis communication theory, crisis management approaches, classic cases and the influence of culture on crisis communication. In addition to traditional methods, the class will engage in simulations, field trips and individual research to master the content area.

**Course Objectives.** The objective of this course is to master the foundational principles of crisis communication and management. Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Discuss the foundational principles and theory of crisis communication
- Describe the phases of a crisis and theoretical foundations of crisis management
- Understand the role of culture and organizational context in crisis communication
- Apply crisis communication techniques to real-world cases and be able to evaluate existing real-world communication materials
- Complete an in-depth research analysis of one aspect of crisis communication

**Required Text.**

Fearn-Banks, Kathleen

*Crisis Communications, A Casebook Approach, 3rd Ed.* (2007) Pub: Erlbaum. “Textbook” Cases. Rumors and Cybercrises. Natural Disasters. Cultures: Foreign and Domestic. Death and Injury. Consumer-Caused Crises. The Crisis Communications Plan. Appendices.

ISBN 978-0-8058-5773-3

*Please read the textbook before arriving in France!*

### CLASS PROTOCOLS

**Attendance.** We are professionals and will operate according to standards of professional behavior, so attendance at all class meetings is mandatory. Anything else will negatively affect your grade. This is a summer course in a foreign country, so class time is already limited. Be prepared for some flexible class times so that we can take advantage of local opportunities for guest speakers and excursions.

**Students with Special Needs.** I am committed to working with students with special needs. Students with disabilities documented by the Dean of Students Office should notify me **before we leave for France** to discuss requests for special provisions.

**Diversity Statement.** Effective communication relies on the ability to recognize and embrace diversity in all its forms, including viewpoints. Throughout the class, you will have opportunities to see how different cultural perspectives influence risk & crisis communication. You are encouraged take advantage of these opportunities in your own work, and also to learn from the information and ideas shared by other students.

**Academic Honesty.** The work you turn in must be your own work and it must be original for this class. You must not use direct or paraphrased material from any other source, including websites, without attribution. You cannot turn in anything that you wrote for another class, at an internship, as a volunteer or in another academic or professional setting. I will handle any incident of academic dishonesty in accordance with the University of Florida policy. The academic honesty policy and consequences can be found at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/procedures/academicguide.php>

**Deadlines.** All assignments are due *by the start of class* on the date of the deadline. Late assignments will lose one letter grade for each day they are late.

**Grading.** You will be evaluated based on the ideas you conceive, the extent to which you develop them, and the quality of your delivery (in print: neat, error-free, typed copy that is grammatically correct, logically organized and easy to understand; in oral presentation: clear, succinct, logical delivery with neat, error-free visuals). The final research paper should conform to the *APA Publication Manual* unless you have approval to use another format.

When you're working on your projects, class readings and anything associated with this class, doing just what is expected, to me, is "average" and warrants a "C." To earn an "A" means your work in all aspects and on all assignments is exceptional. Skating through or last-minute work almost always results in a low grade. The grading scales will be as follows: 90-100 (A), 86-89.9 (B+), 80-85.9 (B), 76-79.9 (C+), 70-75.9 (C), 66-69.9 (D+), 60-65.9 (D), < 59.9 (E).

- A: Excellent; clearly outstanding in concept development and writing style
- B: Good; well above average
- C: Acceptable; fulfills minimum requirements to pass the course
- D: Poor; does not meet requirements
- E: Fails to meet even minimum standards

**IMPORTANT NOTE → Format.** In France, since personal laptops are not required nor recommended, you will **handwrite your assignments**; otherwise, all written assignments should be double-spaced and one-sided using a 12-point font and one-inch margins. Page numbers should be included in the header or footer if the assignment is more than one page. It is usually best to use a serif font for enhanced readability.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You will be expected to participate in class discussions and to incorporate into your assignments the information covered in lectures, discussion and readings. Your knowledge and ability to apply the course material will be assessed in the following ways:

1. Class participation & reaction outlines (25%)
2. European crisis analyses (25%)
3. Individual project (50%)

**1. Reaction outlines (40%).** You must attend and be prepared to participate in class. Analysis of your assigned readings is an important way to get the discussion going between classmates since we meet for short

classes. Please bring your reaction outlines to class and be ready to turn them in at the beginning of class for assignment of credit (these can be neatly handwritten). They will be returned to you before class discussion so that you may reference them. Each reaction outline must contain the following two elements: **YOU MUST ORGANIZE THESE IN TRADITIONAL OUTLINE FORM**

I. 5 key points from your readings (organized a. b. c. d. and e.): Summarize the 5 points that stood out most from you in the readings for the day. These can be unexpected findings, points you think you should not forget, or any other point you find important. You can think of this as “if you were to tell your parents 5 things you learned in the readings what would they be?” You can have more than five points on your summary if you choose and think it will help you in class discussion, **but you must** identify your top-5 from those points. *NOTE: if a pdf article is assigned along with a chapter, devote three points to the chapter and two points to the article.*

II. Two discussion questions (a. and b.): These questions may serve as starters for class discussion based on the readings. These questions might be points about which you want your classmates’ perspective, you may want further clarification of a concept or to see if they think it applies to another situation, or it can be where you disagree with the reading and want to see if the class agrees. Any question that **expands upon and reacts to** the readings is acceptable – you shouldn’t just ask for a definition that is already in the text. *NOTE: if a pdf article is assigned along with a chapter, devote one discussion question to the chapter and one question to the article.*

**2. European crisis analyses (20%).** In France you will be asked to complete two analyses of **current crises** in any European country. This means you will have to watch the news and read English newspapers while you are traveling. No specific length required; just provide informed and thoughtful answers to all of the guideline suggestions/questions. Guidelines:

*(Analyses to be conducted and hand-written in France, submitted in outline format.)*

- I. Define the organization and its crisis / potential crisis.
- II. Crises develop in four stages: Warning (detection, prevention, preparation), Point-of-no-return (containment), Cleanup (recovery), and Back-to-normal (learning). What stage(s) apply to this crisis?
- III. Who do you think is in charge of managing the crisis?
  - a. What are their highest priorities?
- IV. Attempt to define the stakeholders and their concerns.
  - a. What are the communication strategies?
  - b. What are the messages?
  - c. Are there any inconsistencies between early response and later response?
  - d. Did the organization utilize any intermediaries to help manage its relationships with stakeholders?
- V. Evaluate the organization’s responses.
  - a. Restores trust? Damaging? Honest? Explanatory? Plain speech vs. technical speech? Deflects or invites participation of those affected to seek solutions? Ignores, meets or exceeds stakeholder expectations?
  - b. Were concerns dismissed? Was blame cast elsewhere? Were mistakes acknowledged? Sympathetic? Were public apologies made?
- VI. In your opinion, how well was the organization prepared for this crisis? Explain.
- VII. If an organization’s reputation has been damaged, how might it be restored?
- VIII. Can you detect or predict any potential benefits from this crisis?

**3. Final Project (40%).** When your return to the U.S., you will complete an individual 12-15-page analysis (list references separately) of a **current crisis** in the United States (typed, double-spaced with 1” margins) that will be due by noon on June 27. The analysis will require you to integrate the readings we have discussed during the course and apply them to real situations. Guidelines will be made available.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

- Class time TBD
- Guest lecturers TBD
- Additional readings TBD (and posted in revised syllabus by March 1)
- Please complete readings before arriving in France!

### (Class 1). Introduction to Crisis Communication

*Reading:* Fearn-Banks Chapter 1

### (Class 2). Managing the Crisis

(First reaction paper due.)

*Reading:* Fearn-Banks Chapter 2

### (Class 3). Crisis Communication Theory

(Second reaction paper due.)

*Reading:* Fearn-Banks Chapter 3

### (Class 4). Textbook Cases

Third reaction paper due.) (First crisis analysis due.)

*Reading:* Fearn-Banks Chapter 4

### (Class 5). Rumors and Cybercrises

(Fourth reaction paper due.)

*Reading:* Fearn-Banks Chapter 5

### (Class 6). Natural Disasters

(Fifth reaction paper due.)

*Reading:* Fearn-Banks Chapter 6

### (Class 7). Cultures: Foreign and Domestic

(Sixth reaction paper due.)

*Reading:* Fearn-Banks Chapter 7

### (Class 8). Death and Injury

(Seventh reaction paper due.)

*Reading:* Fearn-Banks Chapter 8

### (Class 9). Consumer-Related Crises

(Eighth reaction paper due.) (Second crisis analysis due.)

*Reading:* Fearn-Banks Chapter 9

**NOON Tuesday June 30. Final project due**