

# **SYLLABUS : PUR 4932.2E65 Crisis Communications (☀)**

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

Office: Weimer 2091

Office Hours: T 2-4 p.m.;

W 4-5 p.m.; R 12-1 p.m. \*

Term: Spring 2019

Course Time: M 3-4:55 p.m.; W 3-3:50p.m.

Course Location: Weimer 2050

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

**Contact Information:** Email: [fordp@ufl.edu](mailto:fordp@ufl.edu); Phone: 352-294-0493; Text: 703-966-8138;

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. 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.

## **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, government officials, key opinion leaders, community 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 Mass Communications Objectives

Contributes to learning outcomes required by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications for all students by the time they graduate:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the US
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;

- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.

### **Required Book**

- W. Timothy Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications (available online at [Amazon](#), [iBooks](#) and other sites) ISBN: 9781544331959

### **Additional Readings as Assigned**

Students will be expected to be regular readers of some or all the following: PRWeek, the Holmes Report, IPR Research Letter, O'Dwyer's Daily, PR News, and other selected trade and business publications and sites that cover aspects of the PR business. The professor will provide 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 quizzes.

### **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. Students are expected to arrive on time, not leave early unless prior permission is granted, and wait for the class to end before packing to leave. Please note the significant impact of attendance and active participation in your final grade (30% of grade) and be sure to show up and speak up.
- Further, students are expected to conduct themselves in an honest, ethical, and courteous manner — with classmates and the professor. Eating and privately chatting in class do not demonstrate professional behavior. Chatting while the professor or another student is talking is unacceptable behavior; such actions can result in being asked to leave the classroom and will result in a lowering of your class participation grade.

- Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off completely during class, unless authorized by the professor. In the event of an emergency situation, notify the professor at the start of class. Laptops may be used as a note-taking device. Unless otherwise authorized by the professor, surfing the Internet, checking or sending email, playing games, and other online activities not related to class are strictly prohibited.

## **Course Grades**

The evaluation of coursework will be based on the student's performance in four areas, each of which constitutes a proportion of the final grade. These include: attendance and active participation; quizzes; individual assignments (which will include developing a crisis case study); and one group experiential learning project. The allocations for each are as follows:

### **Active Participation: 30%**

- Attendance and active participation are mandatory. Absences count from the first class. After due warning, the professor 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." You are responsible for notifying the professor in advance of the cause of your absence and, if it is due to illness, provide a note from your medical provider. For further information on attendance policy, please consult: <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationattendance.html>.

### **Individual Assignments / Case Study 25%**

- Individual assignments will provide an opportunity for you to explore various aspects of crisis management. The most important of these will be to prepare a case study on a specific crisis (current or past). Directions will be provided early in the semester.

### **Crisis Group Project and Presentation: 20%**

- This is a semester-long group project that will require you to work collaboratively with fellow students to develop a comprehensive crisis management plan, providing appropriate elements a client would use pre-crisis, during the crisis and post-crisis. Directions and team assignments will be provided early in the semester.

### **Quizzes: 25%**

- At least 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, handouts, guest lectures and class discussions.

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 92-100%	C 72-77%
A- 90-91%	C- 70-71%
B+ 86-89%	D+ 68-69%
B 82-85%	D 62-67%
B- 80-81%	D- 60-61%
C+ 78-79%	E below 60%

*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>

## **No Make-Up Quizzes**

If you miss a quiz without prior permission, you will receive a grade of zero for that quiz. Documented exceptions for extreme circumstances will be considered and should be communicated to the professor prior to 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/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

## **End of Course Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. 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>.

## **The Honor Pledge**

The University of Florida Honor Code applies to all work related to this class. All students are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. Students are expected to attend every class, arrive on time, and participate in class discussions. Assigned readings should be completed prior to class, and students should be prepared to discuss the assigned material. Any material discussed in class and/or covered in the assigned readings may be included on examinations. Students will not be allowed to make up quizzes. Exceptions to this policy will be limited to documented exceptional (as defined by the professor) circumstances and at the discretion of the professor. Students arriving more than 10 minutes late to a quiz may be prohibited from taking the quiz.

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 (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obliged to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the professor in this class.

## **Students with Accommodations**

We are committed to helping students with special challenges overcome difficulties with comprehending the subject matter, while abiding by the standard code of confidentiality. In order to address academic needs, we must be informed of the student's circumstance at the beginning of the semester *before* performance becomes a factor. This is not to imply that standards of fairness will not be generally applied when evaluating student work; only that reasonable and appropriate measures will be taken to ensure that officially recognized challenges do not become a hindrance to a student's ability to succeed in this course.

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (Disability Research Center – 352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter that must be presented to the professor when requesting accommodation. Students with challenges should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

## Campus Resources: Health and Wellness

### **U Matter, We Care:**

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto: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/Default.aspx>, 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**, 392-1111 (or **9-1-1** for emergencies).

<http://www.police.ufl.edu/>

## Academic Resources

Learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to [Learning-support@ufl.edu](mailto:Learning-support@ufl.edu).  
<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.

Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling.

<http://www.crc.ufl.edu/>

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

## Other Important Notes

- The professor reserves the right to make changes, if necessary, to the grading system, schedule, or other matters pertaining to the class.
- The professor may be reached via email ([fordp@ufl.edu](mailto:fordp@ufl.edu)), telephone (352-294-0493) or text (703-966-8138). Please be aware that the professor may not be able to respond immediately to your communication. As a rule, allow up to 48 hours for a response. Therefore, barring an emergency situation, it is advisable to contact the professor well in advance of a quiz or a deadline in order to give the professor adequate time to respond.
- Students are not to consume food in the classroom or to use laptop computers other than to take class notes or follow PowerPoint presentations. Use of mobile telephones or other electronic devices is not allowed during class.
- Students are not permitted to bring guests to class unless special arrangements have been made with the professor prior to class.
- If you notice yourself having trouble in the course, it is crucial that you see 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 during my office hours, or by appointment. Ideally, every student in the class should plan to have at least one 1:1 meeting with the professor in his office during the course of the semester.
- You are expected to arrive promptly for class, fully prepared to discuss the assigned readings. While I understand the problems created by a large campus, it is your responsibility to arrive in class in a timely manner.
- 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.
- An assignment turned in past the deadline will be penalized one letter grade for each weekday it is late. This is a business where deadlines count. You can't make excuses to your boss or a client if your work 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 will 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.*
- Misspelling company or agency names during exercises will result in a letter grade deduction. Check your work!

### Course Schedule

<b>Jan 7</b>	Course overview and introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete personal information sheet</li> </ul>
<b>Jan 9</b>	Crisis du jour (discuss crisis in the news that week) Lecture: Crisis management today – our approach (ongoing crisis mgmt.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline of three-stage approach</li> <li>• Importance of ethical conduct (learn Page Principles)</li> <li>• Read: Coombs, chapter 1</li> </ul>
<b>Jan 14</b>	Guest lecture: A practitioner's overview from the field <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jim McAvoy, former global head of crisis comms, Accenture</li> </ul> Discuss individual and group assignments Teams for group assignment announced
<b>Jan 16</b>	Crisis du jour (team 1) Lecture: Risk management, crisis prevention and crisis mitigation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building the crisis-resistant organization</li> <li>• Read Coombs chapters 2-3</li> </ul>
<b>Jan 21</b>	<b>Martin Luther King Holiday</b>
<b>Jan 23</b>	Crisis du jour (team 2) Lecture: Pre-crisis preparation (part 1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerability assessments and scenario planning</li> <li>• Selecting and training the crisis management team (CMT)</li> <li>• Selecting and training spokesperson(s)</li> <li>• Why do company's conduct crisis simulations?</li> <li>• Read: Coombs, chapter 4</li> </ul>
<b>Jan 28</b>	Crisis du jour (team 3) Lecture: Pre-crisis preparation (part 2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a crisis communications plan</li> <li>• Breakout sessions for start of group project</li> <li>• Read Coombs, chapter 6</li> </ul>
<b>Jan 30</b>	<b>Quiz #1</b>
<b>Feb 4</b>	Crisis simulation exercise with guest speaker Scott Farrell <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scott Farrell, global corporate practice leader, Golin</li> </ul>

- Feb 6** Crisis du jour (team 4)  
Crisis case studies and update on individual project
- Feb 11** Individual project deadline: submit case studies
- First round of individual presentations
- Feb 13** Lecture: Crisis response strategies
- Impact of social media
  - Forms of crisis response
  - Content of crisis response
  - Research imperatives (primary and secondary research)
  - Read Coombs, chapter 7
- Feb 18** Guest lecture (speaker to be confirmed)  
Individual project presentations (continued)
- Feb 20** Lecture: Post-crisis phase
- Crisis evaluation
  - Lessons learned and communicating on corrective actions
  - Research on reputation recovery
  - Read Coombs, chapter 8
- Feb 25** Interactive discussion: overall recap on what we've learned so far
- Breakout discussions on key learnings
  - Breakout sessions for group project collaboration
- Complete individual project presentations  
Read Coombs, Epilogue
- Feb 27** Guest lecture: Rob Flaherty, Global Chair, Ketchum
- Mar 4-6** **Spring break**
- Mar 11** Guest lecture: Alison Cahill, Director, corporate comms, Capital One Financial  
Lecture: Challenging crisis situations
- Cybersecurity – data breaches
  - Product contamination / product tampering
  - Environmental / natural disasters
- Mar 13** Managing crises in the social media ecosystem
- Mar 18** Lecture: Communicating numbers in a crisis
- Primary and secondary research in crisis situations
  - Real-time social media monitoring and reporting
- Mar 20** **Quiz #2**
- Mar 25** Interactive session (including breakouts)
- Crisis messaging
  - Crisis message / spokesperson training
- Mar 27** First draft of group project due  
Distribute and discuss case for crisis simulation
- Apr 1** Crisis simulation exercise

- Apr 3** Breakouts: Groups meet to prepare final presentation
- Apr 8** Lecture: Organizational crises
- Ethical issues
  - Workplace issues, including safety, harassment, discrimination
  - Labor-related issues
- Apr 10** Iconic case studies
- Apr 15** Renewal and reputation recovery: which companies got it right
- Apr 17** Guest lecture: Ron Culp, Former CCO, senior agency leader and “pracademic”
- Apr 22** Rehearsal time and initial group presentations (**Presentation done and ready to practice!**)
- Apr 24** **Group presentations**
- Apr 29** **Group presentations and feedback**
- Semester ends- Have a great summer!**