

# **SYLLABUS: PUR 4932.2E65 (19983) Crisis Communications (☀)**

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

Office: Weimer 3115

Term: Spring 2020

Office Hours: T 1:00-4:30 p.m.\*

Course Time: M 12:50-2:45 p.m.; W 1:55-2:45 p.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.

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**(☀) 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, 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 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, PR News, and other selected trade and business publications and sites that cover aspects of the PR business. **PRWeek is accessible to UF students through the UF George A. Smathers Libraries online database system.** The professor will provide additional reading materials (e.g. media articles or book chapters) over the course of the semester.

### **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.
- 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; individual assignments; tests; and one group experiential learning project. The allocations for each are as follows:

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

- Attendance and active participation are mandatory. You will be expected to join in our "crisis du jour" and other interactive exercises, and to be fully engaged at all times. Absences count from the first class following drop/add period. 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 Assignment / Case Study 25%**

- Students will be required to prepare a case study on a specific crisis (current or recent) selected by you. Grading will be based on your selection of a compelling case and your overview of the company overall and this case specifically; on your analysis of how key primary and secondary stakeholders are affected; how the company engages key stakeholders; the role of social media in triggering, escalating, or alleviating the crisis; how the company handled the postcrisis recovery; and if/how the company adhered to the spirit of the Page Principles. Students may be asked to present a synopsis of their cases to the class. Further details will be provided during the semester.

### **Crisis Group Project and Presentation: 25%**

- This is a semester-long group project that will require you to work collaboratively with fellow students to develop a comprehensive crisis communications case study, based on a case chosen by your team and approved by the professor. You will provide a company overview and a situation analysis, including analysis of the trigger event and/or the organizational issues that led to the crisis. You will be expected to provide a comprehensive stakeholder impact and engagement assessment. You will report on the role social media played in triggering and/or escalating the crisis, and the company's during the crisis and postcrisis. Directions and team assignments will be provided early in the semester.

### **Quiz: 20%**

- One quiz will be scheduled. This will be a short-answer quiz designed to test the students' understanding of key concepts of ongoing crisis communications management addressed in the course textbook and discussed in class by the professor and/or guest lecturers.

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 93-100%	C 72-77%
A- 90-92%	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>

## **End of 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**

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 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 TAs in this class.

## **Students with Accommodations**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource 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 which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

## **Campus Resources**

### **Health and Wellness Resources**

*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*: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>, 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**

*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>.

*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.

### **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), 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 24 hours for a response.
- 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. The professor will be happy to meet with you during office hours (Tuesday 1:00 – 4:30 p.m.); to ensure availability for 1:1 discussion at specific times, please make an appointment. We can also schedule appointments on other days/times by appointment. Ideally, every student in the class should plan to have at least one 1:1 meeting with the professor in his office (Weimer 3115) during the course of the semester.
- You are expected to arrive promptly for class, fully prepared to discuss the assigned readings.
- 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 would like help with presentation skills, schedule time with the professor during office hours.
- 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 may result in a letter grade deduction. Check your work!