

Fall 2020 Syllabus: Crisis Communications (☀) PUR 4932.11D6 (21348)

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

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

Office Hours*: Monday 4:00-5:00 p.m.; Tuesday 1:30-5:30 p.m.*

**Zoom or phone -- Appointments required and may also be possible outside office hours.*

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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 2020, amid multiple global crises. 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.

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

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that by graduation all students should be able to:

- 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.

Readings

Required Book

- W. Timothy Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (5th 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 free updates from *PRWeek Daily Breakfast Briefing*. **PRWeek is accessible to UF students through the UF George A. Smathers Libraries online database system.** The professor will provide or assign 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 the test. Generally, assigned reading (book chapters or other articles) in the syllabus should be read in advance of the class for which they are listed. Be prepared for the professor to call on you in that class to discuss the assigned readings.

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 log into Zoom on time, not leave early unless prior permission is granted, and wait for the class to end before logging off. *Please note the significant impact of attendance and active participation in your final grade (25% 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.

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; an individual assignment (which will include developing a case study related to a corporate crisis and presenting it to the class); one group experiential learning project (collaborating with team members and presenting the final report to the class); and a final test.

Active Participation: 25%

- Attendance and active participation are mandatory. Students will be expected to participate in various interactive exercises on real-world crisis situations and to be fully engaged – with live video activated -- at all times unless cleared in advance with the professor. Absences count from the first class following the 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: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>.

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 company's handling of a crisis. You will select the company and the case (subject to the professor's approval; it must be a case in which social media was or could have been a factor; and it must not be the company/case being analyzed by your group for the group project). The grade will be based on: case selection – how compelling is the situation and its business impact on the company; a company overview that puts the case in context and provides data and analysis on the potential risks to the company; analysis of how prepared the company appeared to be for rapid response; a comprehensive analysis of how the company engaged with primary and secondary stakeholders through direct engagement, media relations, and social media interaction; style and quality of writing; and quality of a presentation deck accompanying the case study, which may be used in class presentations to illustrate and bring the case to life.

Test: 25%

- One test will be scheduled. This 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 the 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 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:

93-100 = A
90-92 = A-
88-89 = B+
82-87 = B
80-81 = B-
78-79 = C+
75-77 = C
70-74 = C-
68-69 = D+
60-67 = D
Below 60 = E

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. [Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner](#). 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 ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here](#).

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](#).

Other Important Notes

- ***Our class sessions may be audio visually recorded*** for students in the class to refer back and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and

unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited.

- 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. 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 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. 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.
- 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 the professor.
- An assignment turned in past the deadline may be penalized one letter grade for each weekday it is late. This is a business where deadlines count.
- 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

Readings are to be done BEFORE the date listed below

- M. Aug 31** Course overview and introductions
- Interactive crisis response exercise
 - Importance of ethical conduct (Page Principles)
 - Group and individual assignment details
- W. Sep 2** Interactive review: "A Need for More Crisis Management Knowledge"
- Read: Chapter 1, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding*
 - Outline of three-stage approach
 - Importance of crisis management
- M. Sep 7** **Holiday: Labor Day**
- W. Sep 9** "Crisis du jour"
Lecture: Looking at 2020 through a crisis practitioner's perspective
- M. Sep 14** Interactive review: Risk management, crisis prevention and crisis mitigation
- Read: Ch. 2-3, *Ongoing Crisis Communication*
 - "Enterprise Risk Management" (ch.2)
 - "Building Crisis Resistant Organizations" (ch.3)
- W. Sep 16** Lecture: Stakeholder theory as it relates to corporate reputation and resilience
Interactive review: "Stakeholder Engagement – Creating and Sustaining Advocacy"
- Read ch. 5, *New Era of the CCO* (copies posted on Canvas Files)
 - Ted Talk on stakeholder theory
- M. Sep 21** Guest lecture: Scott Farrell, President, Global Corporate Practice, Golin
- Interactive crisis simulation
- W. Sep 23** Lecture: Crisis Preparing (part 1)
- Vulnerability assessments and scenario planning
 - Selecting and training the crisis management team (CMT)
 - Read: Ch. 4, *Ongoing Crisis Communication*
- M. Sep 28** Guest lecture: Neil Foote, President/CEO, Foote Communications LLC and President, National Black Public Relations Society
"Preventing Crises Relating to the National Reckoning on Systemic Racial Inequality"
Individual case study assignment due
- Student case study presentations
- W. Sep 30** Student case study presentations
- M. Oct 5** Guest lecture: Vanessa Wakeman, CEO, The Wakeman Agency
Student individual case study presentations (continued)
- W. Oct 7** Student individual case study presentations (continued)
Discussion of group project followed by team breakouts

- M. Oct 12** Guest lecture: Vivian Lines, CEO, Lines Consulting, Ltd. (Hong Kong)
“Managing Crisis Communication/Engagement across Asia Pacific”
- Lecture: Crisis Preparing (part 2)
- Developing a Crisis Communication Plan
 - Stakeholders and Preparation
 - Read: Ch. 5, *Ongoing Crisis Communication*
- W. Oct 14** Lecture: Crisis Responding
- The need for speed
 - Speaking with one voice
 - Transparency
 - Strategic focus
 - Read: Ch. 7, *Ongoing Crisis Communication*
- M. Oct 19** Guest lecture: Chris Chiames, CCO, Carnival Cruise Lines
- “Sustaining Reputation During a Global Pandemic”
- W. Oct 21** Crisis du jour
Case study: corporate response to national BLM crisis
- M. Oct 26** Interactive Review: Postcrisis Concerns
- Postcrisis evaluation
 - Follow-up communication
 - Read: Ch. 8, *Ongoing Crisis Communication*
- W. Oct 28** Guest lecture: Rachel Katz, Founder, RBK+Co (and CJC alum)
- “Crisis management for small business”
- M. Nov 2** Crisis du jour
Group project breakouts
- W. Nov 4** Crisis du jour
Group Projects Due
- M. Nov 9** Guest lecture: Samantha Lucas, Advocate Communications, Office of CEO, Johnson & Johnson
- “How an Iconic Global Corporation Steps Up Amid Global Crises”
- W. Nov 11** **Holiday: Veterans Day**
- M. Nov 16** Guest lecture: Jim McAvoy, Managing Partner, The Issues Management Group
“Perspectives on Crisis Communication in a Tumultuous Year”
- W. Nov 18** Group presentations
- M. Nov 23** Crisis du jour
- W. Nov 25** **Holiday – Thanksgiving**
- M. Nov 30** Group presentations

W. Dec 2	Group presentation
M. Dec 7	Test
W. Dec 9	Course wrap-up and key takeaways