



## **SYLLABUS – PUR4400C.29097 Crisis Communications(☼)**

**Spring 2024 – M 4:05-6:00 p.m., W 5:05-6:00 p.m. (Online)**

**Professor: Patty Caballero, Department of Public Relations**

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### **Course Description**

This course will focus 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 crisis management is greater than ever. And it is far more challenging. This course will reflect the crisis management process: prevention, preparation, response and long-term impact. Emphasis will be placed on the practical application of crisis communications theory, with copious use of real-life case studies and guest lectures by top crisis 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 vulnerability assessment
- Understand the typical stages of a crisis, and how they are changing in the social media era
- Learn to define the crisis and identify the stakeholders most affected by it
- Identify and address the ethical issues presented by the crisis
- 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.)

*Prerequisite: PUR 3000 Principles of Public Relations*

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## Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

The course specifically supports six of the 11 professional values and competencies required of graduates by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC):

- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to mass communications.
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles, and work ethically.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Conduct research and evaluate information by appropriate methods.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve

## Required Book

W. T. Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Copyright 2023 by Sage Publications ISBN: 9781071816646 (Paperback) (available online at [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/Ongoing-Crisis-Communication-Planning-Responding/dp/9781071816646) and other sites)

## Additional Readings as Assigned

Students will be expected to be regular readers of business news, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Financial Times*, *Reuters News*, *Bloomberg* and other respected business news sources. In addition, students will be expected to read trade publications and sites that cover aspects of the PR business, such as the following: PRWeek, the Holmes Report, IPR Research Letter, O'Dwyer's Daily, PR News, AdAge Daily, and Adweek.

## Online Course Administration — e-Learning in Canvas

<http://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 Evaluation

The evaluation of coursework will be based on the student's performance in four major areas, each of which constitutes a proportion of the final grade. These include weekly attendance and active participation, quizzes, one individual analysis of a case presentation, and one group experiential learning project. The area and allocations for each are as follows:

### Active Participation: 20%

This class requires active participation. That means that cameras should be on and students should actively participate in discussions and breakout group assignments. Students who have their cameras on the entire class and actively participate will receive higher marks for participation than those who keep cameras off or do not participate in the discussions.

Attendance is mandatory. After due warning, I 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." For further information on attendance policy, please consult:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

### Case Study Paper: 30%

This individual assignment will provide an opportunity for you to explore a crisis and outline it in a case study. Directions will follow.

### Crisis Group Project and Presentation: 25%

This is a semester-long group project that will require you to provide appropriate elements a client would use pre-, during and post-crisis. Directions will follow.

### Quizzes: 25%

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, guest lectures and class discussions.

*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>

*The grading scale for the course is as follows:*

A 94-100%	B- 80-83%	D+ 67-69%
A- 90-93%	C+ 77-79%	D 64-66%
B+ 87-90%	C 74-76%	D- 61-63%
B 84-86%	C- 70-73%	F below 61%

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## Course Professionalism

The College of Journalism and Communications is a professional school and professional decorum is always expected. Therefore, the students, and the professor, adhere to workplace norms for collegial and respectful interaction. Part of the discussion may involve topics that are potentially divisive and controversial. We will not debate or take positions on these issues. We will limit our discussion to how communication of these topics should be managed in a crisis.

Students are expected to arrive on time, not leave early unless prior permission is granted, and wait for the class to end before leaving.

Assignments are provided on this syllabus with due dates throughout the semester. An assignment turned in past the deadline will be penalized one letter grade for each weekday it is late. Public Relations is a business where deadlines count. Managers and clients won't accept excuses if your work is late.

Further, students are expected to conduct themselves in an honest, ethical, and courteous manner — with classmates, and the professor. In an online class, being present is important. Please keep cameras on. Chatting while the professor, or another student is talking is unacceptable behavior. Please consider that there is sometimes a delay with video calls. I will make every effort to ensure that everyone's voice is heard, but please be conscious of not speaking over each other.

Cell phones and other electronic devices must not be used during class and turned off completely during class. In the event of an emergency, notify the professor at the start of class. Laptops may be used for note-taking. Surfing the Internet, checking or sending email, playing games, and other online activities not related to class are strictly prohibited.

## There Are No Make-Up Quizzes

If you miss a quiz you will receive a grade of zero for that quiz. Documented exceptions for extreme circumstances will be considered and should be discussed with the professor before 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/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

Students arriving more than 10 minutes late to a quiz will not be allowed to take the quiz.

## End of Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals>. 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/>.

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## Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://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

- **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> (Links to an external site.), and 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** at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or <http://www.police.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.).

## Academic Resources

- **E-learning technical support**, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail Learning-support@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml> (Links to an external site.).
- **Career Resource Center**, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <https://www.crc.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.).
- **Library Support**, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask> (Links to an external site.). Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- **Teaching Center**, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.).
- **Writing Studio**, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> (Links to an external site.).
- **Student Complaints**  
**Campus:** [https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF\\_Complaints\\_policy.pdf](https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf) (Links to an external site.).
- **On-Line Students Complaints:** <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process> (Links to an external site.).

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## Other Important Notes

- The professor reserves the right to make changes, if necessary, to the grading system, schedule, or other matters about the class.
- The professor may also be reached via email, but please be aware that the professor will not be able to respond immediately to your communication. As a rule, allow up to 48 hours for a response. Therefore, barring an emergency, it is advisable to contact the professor well in advance of a quiz or a deadline 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 before class.
- If you notice yourself having trouble in the course, you must 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 by appointment.
- You are expected to arrive promptly for class, fully prepared to discuss the assigned readings.
- This course requires original work, created by you at this time, for this purpose. 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. Do not submit work generated primarily through artificial intelligence (AI) tools. Work that is primarily written by artificial intelligence (AI) is not acceptable. AI is here to stay, and we need to learn to work with it. If students use AI to help generate a first draft or brainstorm an idea, that is acceptable if the final submission is developed by the student. If generative AI was used, the student should provide a log of prompts used to develop the draft. I will use tools to detect whether submitted work is plagiarized or primarily generated using an AI tool like ChatGPT or Google Bard.
- Spelling counts. So do grammar, punctuation and professional presentation techniques. Misspelling your client or agency name during exercises will result in a letter grade deduction. Check your work!
- Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in an "E" for the course and possible disciplinary action.
- An assignment turned in after 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 not in the readings. You will be quizzed on this information.

## Course Schedule and Readings

Class Date	Readings for that Class
Monday, January 8	Course Introduction and overview Ch. 1 Crisis communications theory Read: Coombs, Ch. 1
Wednesday, January 10	Ch.1 Crisis communications theory (continued)
Monday, January 15	<b>MLK DAY NO CLASS</b>
Wednesday, January 17	Topic: Writing a Case Study
Monday, January 22	Topic: Understanding Risk for Crisis Management Read: Coombs, Ch. 2
Wednesday, January 24	Ch. 2 continued
Monday, January 29	Topic: The Risk Mitigation Process Read: Coombs Ch. 3
Wednesday, January 31	Risk Mitigation Process (continued) Vulnerability Exercise
Monday, February 5	Crisis Simulation Exercise (Scott Farrell)
Wednesday, February 7	IRL - To be confirmed
Monday, February 12	IRL – Jason Molinet, Northwell Health
Wednesday, February 14	Topic: Crisis preparedness Read: Coombs Ch. 4-5 Discuss: Crisis Group Project (CGP)
Monday, February 19	Topic: Crisis preparedness (continued) Read: Coombs Ch. 4-5
Wednesday, February 21	Quiz 1
Monday, February 26	Topic: Crisis preparedness (continued) Read: Coombs Ch. 4-5 Discuss: CGP: Groups, roles & responsibilities Case Study Paper Due
Wednesday, February 28	Case Study Presentations
Monday, March 4	Case Study Presentations
Wednesday, March 6	IRL – To be confirmed

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March 9 - 16	<b>SPRING BREAK NO CLASS</b>
Monday, March 18	Topic: Crisis preparedness (continued) Read: Coombs Ch. 4-5
Wednesday, March 20	IRL - To be confirmed
Monday, March 25	Topic: Crisis Responding Read: Coombs Ch. 7
Wednesday, March 27	IRL – To be confirmed
Monday, April 1	Workday for CGP
Wednesday, April 3	Online exercise
Monday, April 8	Topic: Managing the post-crisis challenges and opportunities Read: Coombs Ch. 8
Wednesday, April 10	<b>TBD</b>
Monday, April 15	CGP presentations
Wednesday, April 17	CGP presentations
Monday, April 22	CGP presentations (if needed) Quiz: 2
Wednesday, April 24	Wrap-up

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