

PUR 4400C Crisis Communications - Spring 2025

Section: 22839

Course Time: Asynchronous

Location: Canvas

Professor: Indee Freas, Department of Public Relations

Contact Information: Email: ifreas@ufl.edu;

Messages via Canvas are accepted / preferred.

Office Hours: Virtual office hours are held online via Zoom by scheduled appointment.

Prerequisite:

PUR 3000 Principles of Public Relations – C or better

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 as communication technology is constantly expanding, amid multiple global crises. 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. A fictitious crisis will be presented to the class with the expectation of utilizing the principles and techniques learned in class to develop a correct response and plan.

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 social media affects the dynamics
- Identify and address the ethical issues presented by different crisis situations
- Write a crisis communications plan, including a core set of strategic messages for each key stakeholder group
- As a communications professional, how to prepare for a crisis
- Develop a post-crisis plan, which includes learnings for the organization and proof points for stakeholders on corrective actions

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

College of Journalism and Communications Objectives

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

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences, and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style, and grammatical correctness.
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work

Readings

Required Book W. Timothy Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications ISBN: 9781544331959

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 always expected. Therefore, the students, and the professor, adhere to workplace norms for collegial and respectful interaction. Carefully consider how you participate in class discussions and in the assignment, you submit and present. You can use humor and demonstrate creativity but think ahead to how it will reflect on you.

Use your best professional judgment. Projects should not contain nudity, profanity, illegal activities, or situations that would put you or others in danger.

Students are expected to show up on time, not leave early unless prior permission is granted, and wait for the class to end before leaving. This applies to both in-person and Zoom classes. *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

Assignments will be graded, and feedback given within 7 days after the due date.

ASIGNMENT GROUPS WEIGHT

Assignment Percentage of Grade	
Class Discussions	25%
Individual Assignments	25%
Case Study	25%
Final Exam	25%

Class Discussions: 25%

This is a communications-based class. The student views are wanted and needed. Discussions will originate from assigned readings and examine courses of action before, during and after a crisis.

Individual Assignments: 25%

Individual assignments will provide an opportunity for you to explore various aspects of the crisis and how the organization's reputation was affected by their actions regarding the crisis.

Case Study: 25%

For this assignment, you will have to prepare a case study on a specific company's handling of a crisis. You will select the organization and the case (subject to the instructor's approval); it must be a case in which social media was or could have been a factor. The project will have a written and video presentation element.

The grade will be based on: how compelling is the situation and its impact on the organization; a comprehensive analysis of how the organization engaged with primary and secondary stakeholders through direct engagement, media relations, and social media interaction; effectiveness of the case organization's preparation, response and recovery; suggested improvements to the case organization's courses of action throughout the crisis; how well the student uses logic and understands the principles of effective crisis communications.

Final 25%

The course final will be a written test covering the class readings, the class main points, and a short crisis situation where the student offers a solution with various courses of action.

Grading for the course follows current UF grading policies for assigning grade points (see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>).

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

- A = 93.0-100%.
- A- = 90.0-92.99%.
- B+ = 87.0-89.99%.
- B = 83.0-86.99%.
- B- = 80.0-82.99%.
- C+ = 77.0-79.99%.
- C = 74.0-76.99%.
- C- = 70.0-73.99%.
- D+ = 67.0-69.99%.
- D = 64.0-66.99%.
- D- = 60.0-63.99%.
- F = below 60%

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.

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.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

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.

AI Policy for Student Work

In this class I want you to produce all your own work without generative AI's assistance. It is important for me to be able to ascertain what you know and can produce unaided on your own. The use of generative AI for your assignments in this class is a violation of the honor code as you are presenting content as your own that was not fully created by you. There are various AI detection tools available (built within Canvas and externally such as ZeroGPT), and many AI platforms follow very formulaic response patterns. If I am concerned that your work

is not your own, I will try to verify the originality of your work and if evidence is found that your work is AI generated, I will submit your assignment as violating the honor code.

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](#).

Course Schedule (Module Timings and Content on Canvas)

Module 1 General Crisis Management Knowledge

Module 2 How Organizations Recognize a Crisis

Module 3 Ongoing Crisis Communication

Module 4 Leadership in Crisis Communication

Module 5 Crisis Prep

Module 6 Social Media

Module 7 Social Media Continued

Module 8 Recognizing Crises

Module 9 Crisis Responding

Module 10 International Terrorism

Module 11 Post Crisis

Module 12 Case Study Presentation Instructions

Module 13 Case Study Presentations Continued

Module 14 Case Study Presentations Continued

Module 15 Case Study Presentations Continued

Module 16 Final Exam and Final Case Study Submission