

Fall 2025 SYLLABUS: Crisis Communications

PUR 4400C (19453)

University of Florida – Department of Public Relations

Professor: Patrick Ford, Professional-in-Residence

Teaching Assistant: Eva Pantoja

Quick Reference Guide

Item	Details
Class Meetings	Mon 10:40–12:35 (Periods 4-5) Wed 11:45–12:35 (Period 5) Zoom (live/synchronous)
Office Hours	Tue 1–2 p.m. Wed 3–4 p.m. (Appointments recommended; available outside hours by request)
Contact Info	Prof: ford@ufl.edu 703-966-8138 Canvas messages TA: evapantoja@ufl.edu
Note	This syllabus is subject to change at the professor's discretion.

Required Readings

Title	Author	Edition/Year	ISBN	Notes
Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding	W. Timothy Coombs	6th ed. (2023)	9781071816646	Paperback
Reputation First: Building a Crisis Communication Plan	Chris Komisarjevsky	3rd ed. (2024)	9781734641592	Provided at no cost

Additional readings will be provided on Canvas. Read assigned materials before the listed class.

Major Deadlines

Date	Assignment
Oct 8	Individual Case Study Due
Nov 5	Preliminary Draft of Group Project Due
Nov 17	Final Group Project & Presentations Begin
Dec 1–3	Final Presentations & Course Wrap-up

Welcome from Professor Ford

Corporate reputations can take decades to build and minutes to destroy. In this class, you'll learn how to identify risks, prevent and prepare for crises, manage active crises, and rebuild reputation. Through real-world cases, guest speakers, and crisis simulations, you'll develop skills that employers in PR, marketing, and corporate affairs value highly.

What You'll Learn

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Spot early signs of a crisis and recognize types of crises
- Map stakeholders and design engagement strategies
- Apply ethics and cultural fluency in decision-making
- Write an industry-standard corporate case study
- Measure and track corporate reputation over time

Assignments & Grading

Component	% of Grade	Description
Attendance	10%	Be present, on time, and engaged
Participation	30%	Prepare for discussions, engage actively, occasional pop quizzes
Individual Case Study	20%	Research & analyze a recent crisis — portfolio-ready
Group Project	40%	Collaborate on full crisis case study

Academic Policies and Resources

Please see this link to important policies and resources:

<https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies>

Weekly Course Schedule

Week	Dates	Topic / Reading	Notes
1	Aug 25–27	Course overview & introductions	
2	Sept 3	The Changing Nature of Crisis	

		Management in AI-Driven Environments	
3	Sept 8–10	Risk Analysis & Crisis Mitigation Read Ch. 2 & 3 (Ongoing Crisis)	
4	Sept 15–17	Crisis Simulation; Effective Case Studies Workshop	Simulation with Scott Farrell
5	Sept 22–24	Crisis Preparing Read Ch. 4 & 5 (Ongoing Crisis)	
6	Sept 29–Oct 1	Stakeholder Engagement	
7	Oct 6–8	Crisis Responding Read Ch. 7 (Ongoing Crisis)	Individual Assignment Due Oct 8
8	Oct 13–15	Individual Case Study Review	
9	Oct 20–22	Postcrisis Concerns Read Ch. 8 (Ongoing Crisis)	Guest lecture Oct 20: Chris Komisarjevsky
10	Oct 27–29	Crisis Communication Imperatives	Guest lecture Oct 27: Michael Brito and Penny Kozakos of Zeno Group
11	Nov 3–5	Crisis Simulation; Group Project Workshop	Simulation with Scott Farrell Nov 3 Group Project Draft Due Nov 5
12	Nov 10–12	International Crisis Management	Guest lecture TBC
13	Nov 17–19	Final Group Project Due – Presentations Begin	
14	Nov 24–26	Thanksgiving Break – No Classes	
15	Dec 1–3	Final Presentations & Wrap-up	

Appendix

Compliance with ACEJMC Accreditation Standards

Note: This course aligns with Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) accreditation standards and emphasizes competencies in ethical decision-making, culturally proficient communication, stakeholder engagement, and digital literacy.

The ACEJMC 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

Prerequisite:

- PUR 3000 Principles of Public Relations

Additional Grading Details

Attendance 10%

- Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences during the semester may cause a

reduction in credit for attendance and participation. If you need to be excused, you are responsible for notifying the instructor prior to missing class or as soon as possible afterwards in an emergency. Requirements for assignments and other work in this course follow UF policies:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Active Participation Points: 30%

- Active class participation will be assessed and graded on an ongoing basis. To receive high scores, you must demonstrate active engagement, which includes arriving in class on time, keeping your camera on during Zoom sessions, and being prepared to make comments, ask questions, or answer questions as appropriate. We will also have occasional pop quizzes to gauge your understanding of course content and guest-lecture discussions. Each month, you will receive feedback and a point allocation for your participation:
 - Excellent: fully prepared for and performing strongly in discussions and pop quizzes
 - Satisfactory: present and actively listening; but minimal engagement and/or poor pop quiz results
 - Needs Improvement: insufficient presence and engagement

Individual Assignment 20%

- Prepare a brief case study on a specific company's reputation. You will select the company or institution and the case (subject to the professor's approval). Full details on this individual case study project will be provided early in the semester. Other individual projects may be assigned during the semester.

Group Project: Crisis Case Study 40%

This semester-long team project is your opportunity to work closely with a small group of classmates to investigate and analyze a high-impact corporate or institutional crisis. The crisis you select must have significantly affected the organization's reputation and financial performance.

Working with publicly available data, your team will:

1. **Describe the crisis** – Outline the events, timeline, and context, highlighting why it was consequential.
2. **Analyze the risk and impact** – Evaluate the severity of the crisis and its potential long-term effects.
3. **Assess preparedness and response** – Determine how ready the organization was before the crisis and how effectively it acted during the incident.
4. **Examine stakeholder engagement** – Identify primary and secondary stakeholders, assess their reactions, and evaluate the organization's communication with each group.

5. **Evaluate media dynamics** – Analyze the influence of traditional media, social media influencers, governmental actions, and AI-generated content on public perception.
6. **Review recovery efforts** – Assess post-crisis actions aimed at preventing recurrence, rebuilding stakeholder trust, and restoring reputation.

Your work should combine **research, critical thinking, and strategic insight**, resulting in a comprehensive written case study and presentation. Note: your written case study and final presentation will both be evaluated. Detailed instructions 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:

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%. E = below 60%

Further information about grades and grading policy may be found at this [link to the university grades and grading policies](#).

Course Professionalism and Policies

The following expectations are intended to ensure a respectful and professional learning environment:

- Students are expected to conduct themselves in an honest, ethical, and courteous manner – with classmates and the instructor and guest lecturers. This course values and respects diverse experiences, identities, and viewpoints of all students. We aim to foster a classroom environment in which everyone feels safe and encouraged to participate.
- All work must reflect professional standards – avoid any inappropriate or unsafe content.
- Students are expected to attend classes on time and not leave early unless prior approval is granted. *Please note the significant impact of attendance and active participation in your final grade and be sure to show up and speak up as appropriate.*
- Cameras on during Zoom classes (unless you have pre-arranged an exception for technical or accessibility reasons).

Other Important Notes from the Instructor

- Late assignments lose 5% per weekday unless pre-approved.
- I can be reached via email (fordp@ufl.edu), or by telephone or text (703-966-8138). While I always strive to respond in a timely way, please be aware that I may not always be able to respond immediately to your communication. As a rule, allow up to 24 hours for a response.
- Students are not permitted to bring guests to class unless pre-arranged with me or TA Eva Pantoja in advance.
- If you notice yourself having trouble in the course, it is crucial that you speak with me immediately or as soon as possible. Please feel free to contact me 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 Zoom or phone meeting with me during the semester – I can meet with you during office hours or at other times, but I ask that you reach out in advance and schedule an appointment.
- 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, so edit and proofread materials carefully.
- If you need extra help with presentation skills, arrange an appointment with me.
- If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get briefed by another student on the content covered in the class.