

PUR 4400C Crisis Communications – Fall 2025

Section: 20171

Course Time: Asynchronous

Location: Canvas

Professor: Indee Freas, Department of Public Relations

Contact Information: Email: ifreas@ufl.edu;

Messages via Canvas are accepted / Email is 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 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.

ASSIGNMENT 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. Discussion prompts will be embedded into most modules.

Individual Assignments: 25%

The best way to process and apply what you are learning is best to practice doing it. To that effect, we will have activities and short assignments embedded into most modules.

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 reflect the significance of the

situation, the quality of stakeholder engagement (including direct contact, media relations, and social media), and the organization's preparedness and response effectiveness; recovery; suggested improvements to the 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 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](#).

Late Work:

All written assignments must be turned into Canvas by 11:59pm the day the assignment is due. Canvas will automatically mark assignments as late if they are uploaded even one second after 11:59pm. You have 24 hours after the due date to turn in your assignment for a 25% grade reduction, after that no late work is accepted. It is your responsibility to make sure you properly upload your files (docx or .pdf).

Academic Policies and Resources:

For information about academic policies, course evaluations, in-class recording, academic resources, campus health and wellness resources, may be found at this link <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolices>

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.

Course Schedule (Module Timings and Content on Canvas)

Module 1 General Crisis Management Knowledge	<i>Class Assignment</i>
Module 2 How Organizations Recognize a Crisis	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 3 Ongoing Crisis Communication	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 4 Leadership in Crisis Communication	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 5 Crisis Prep	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 6 Social Media	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 7 Social Media Continued	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 8 Recognizing Crises	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 9 Crisis Responding	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 10 International Terrorism	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 11 Post Crisis	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 12 Review Case Study Presentation Instructions	<i>Class Discussion and Assignment</i>
Module 13 Case Study Presentations Continued	<i>Class Discussion</i>
Module 14 Case Study Presentations Continued	<i>Class Discussion</i>
Module 15 Case Study Presentations	<i>Case Study Presentation Due</i>
Module 16 Final Exam	<i>Final Exam Due</i>