

Spring 2026 Syllabus: Crisis Communications – PUR4400C

Section: 3400

Professor: Alisha Katz, APR, MAMC

Contact information: alisha.katz@ufl.edu, 352.284.1515 (best by email or text)

Course Time: Asynchronous

Location: Canvas

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

The syllabus is subject to change as the professor deems appropriate and necessary. All changes will be sent via Canvas announcements and posted on our Canvas page.

Prerequisite

- PUR3000 Principles of Public Relations

Reading

Required: W. Timothy Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (6th ed.). Copyright 2023 by Sage Publications ISBN: 9781071816646

Additional Readings as Assigned

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 quizzes.

Course Goals

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

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.

Online Course Administration – eLearning 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.

Instructor Interaction

The best way to reach me is by e-mail. I check my e-mail account regularly, but please do not expect a response by e-mail after normal business hours/over the weekend. If I have not written back within 48 hours, please send your email again. As my email is considered a state public record, I do not discuss grades or any student records issues via e-mail. Please schedule a meeting with me to discuss these issues. The classroom is typically not an appropriate place for these discussions.

Late or Missed Work

All written assignments must be turned in to 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 uploaded your paper.

Other Important Notes

- Spelling counts, as do grammar, punctuation, and professional presentation techniques.
 - Please abide by AP Style.
- Please appropriately reference ALL sources you choose to incorporate into your assignments, discussions, etc.
 - Follow APA style when referencing.

AI Policy for Student Work

Generative AI tools, like ChatGPT, Microsoft CoPilot and NaviGator, may be required in some assignments / discussion boards and will be clarified in assignment / discussion instructions. In this course, AI tools should not be used as a shortcut and, instead, as a learning tool to promote critical thinking. Any work that is done using generative AI must be cited in your assignment. Please note that any use of generative AI that is NOT properly cited or properly used will be considered a violation of the Honor Code and submitted accordingly.

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. Carefully consider how you participate in class discussions and in the assignments 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

Your grade will be calculated based on the following:

- Discussions: 35%
- Individual Assignments: 25%
- Quizzes: 25%
- Group Project: 15%

Discussions: Weekly discussions require close examination and reflection on weekly materials, including the weekly lecture, textbook reading and additional materials. Discussions are meant to be meaningful and create a respectful dialogue with class peers.

Individual Assignments: Individual assignments provide an opportunity to explore the intricacies of crisis communications. These assignments may include analyzing case studies, developing different components of a crisis communications strategy and more.

Quizzes: Two “open-book” quizzes will be scheduled to test knowledge and understanding of reading materials and lectures.

Final Group Project: Students will be assigned small groups to create a crisis communications plan. The project should be collaborative and must include all elements of a crisis communications plan.

Grading

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%.

F = below 60%

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

Course & Assignment Schedule

Module 1: Exploring Crisis Communications (Overview)

Discussion 1

Module 2: How Organizations Recognize a Crisis

Discussion 2

Module 3: Ongoing Crisis Communications

Assignment 1

Module 4: Leadership in Crisis Communications

Assignment 2

Module 5: Crisis Preparation

Group Project (due at the end of Module 6)

Module 6: Social Media

Group Project (due at the end of Module 6)

Module 7: Social Media – Part II

Discussion 3

Quiz 1

Module 8: Recognizing a Crisis

Discussion 4

Module 9: Crisis Response – Part I

Assignment 3

Module 10: Crisis Response – Part II

Discussion 5

Module 11: International Terrorism

Discussion 6

Module 12: Post Crisis

Assignment 4

Module 13: Ethics

Assignment 5

Module 14: Social Change Stemming from Crises

Discussion 7

Quiz 2

Academic Policies & Resources

A link to the university's academic policies and resources may be found here:

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