

# 533.1 – Crisis Communication - Fall 2022

<b>Instructor:</b> Valerie “VK” Fields	<b>Classroom:</b> Room 101, Curtis Media Center (new building)
<b>Office:</b> Carroll 229	<b>Time:</b> Sect. 001 T/Th 2:00-3:15 p.m.
<b>E-mail:</b> vfields@email.unc.edu	<b>Office Hours &amp; Appts:</b> By Appointment Only – via Zoom

**IMPORTANT: Due to the uncertain impact of COVID-19, this course will be taught in-person – but also recorded on Zoom, if needed. Regardless of class permissions or exemptions from the J-School, students are expected to complete and submit all assignments by the stated deadlines given through digital uploads onto Sakai, using the Assignments tab or completing Tests & Quizzes online via Sakai. Let’s be smart and safe!**

**Course Overview:** “Crisis Communication” provides a comprehensive assessment and understanding of the nature of crises. It also examines the role public relations professionals play in helping corporate, nonprofit, government organizations and individuals to manage and find success through optimal use of mass communication theories and best practices. The course introduces students to the distinctive areas of crisis research and practice as identified by leading crisis theorists—prevention, preparation, recognition, response and post-crisis concerns. It also focuses on the three stages of crisis: 1) pre-crisis; 2) the crisis event; and 3) post-crisis.

**Course Objectives:** By the end of this course, students should be able to demonstrate the following competencies:

- (1) List and explain key terms and principles of contemporary crisis communication management.
- (2) Explain the role of communication, per the National Incident Management System (NIMS), and apply relevant aspects of that system to hypothetical crisis situations.
- (3) Apply crisis communication theories, principles and strategies; understand critical legal and ethical issues.
- (4) Analyze, critique and develop a crisis communication plan.
- (5) Demonstrate media engagement knowledge and skills, along with effective presentation skills for crisis management and crisis communication.

**Prerequisites:** To take this course as an undergraduate it is highly recommended that you have successfully completed MEJO 153 “News Writing and MEJO 137 “Principles of Advertising and Public Relations.”

**Required Texts:** *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding*. Fifth Edition (2015). W. Timothy Coombs. Sage Publications. ISBN: 978-1-4129-8310-5.

## Other Required Resources:

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) operates the Emergency Management Institute (EMI). An online training module is accessible online at <https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-700.b> See IS-700.b *National Incident Management System (NIMS) to complete the training.*

## NIMS Online Training

**Students are required to complete one (1) self-paced NIMS training module and print out the Certificate of Completion for course credit. The certificate is due for credit as part of the Midterm exam grade.**

**Assignments and Deadlines:** All writing assignments must be typed, correctly formatted and turned in on time. For outside assignments, late papers will receive a reduced grade unless you and I agree before the assignment is due that it can be late. Otherwise the assignment will receive an F. No assignment will be accepted if it is turned in more than 24 hours after its deadline.

## Method of study:

Current events, lectures, tabletop exercises, external readings and class discussions about individual and

organizational crisis management are the teaching tools for this course. The professor will present lecture material relevant to crisis cases and, along with guest speakers and supplemental readings, provide real-world examples of a variety of high-profile crisis situations for review and analysis. Group discussion, critical review and practice presentations for crises are the core of the class. Each student is expected to read assigned case material before the class in which it is to be discussed and be prepared to participate actively in crisis case discussions and interactive activities. Ongoing dynamic crisis material will also be presented as current events dictate. NOTE: Class attendance is essential. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to get an "A" in this course without active and thoughtful participation in the discussion of the Crisis Communication cases and tabletop exercises. Students also will be called on to present case facts as well as analyze critical crisis management strategies for class projects.

**MEJO 533 Grades:**

Grading Percentages		Final Course Grade - Scale
Crisis Communication	10%	A = 100-95
Book Review & Presentation and Quick-Response Quizzes		A- = 94-90
		B+ = 89-87
		B = 86-84
Press Conference Briefings & Class Work/Participation	25%	B- = 83-80
		C+ = 79-77
		C = 76-74
Crisis Communication Plan	25%	C- = 73-70
		D = 69-65
Midterm Exam & FEMA/NIMS Certificate	20%	F = 64 and below
Final Exam	20%	

*This course follows the University's Grading Standards:*

"A" students do not miss classes during the semester. They read and critically engage all the assigned textbook chapters and any optional readings on reserve before the material is covered in class. Written assignments and exams are not only complete, but cover more than just the minimum requirements. The assignments exhibit proper style and format, are well organized, integrate strategic planning and targeting, and are written precisely and concisely. All materials are turned in on time or early, and all rewrite opportunities are used. These students keep up with current events.

"B" students miss one or two classes during the semester, but these are excused absences. They usually read the assigned textbook chapters and some of the optional readings on reserve in the library before the material is covered in class. Written assignments and exams usually exhibit proper style and formatting, integrate strategic planning and targeting, are well organized, and are written precisely and concisely. All materials are turned in on time, and all rewrite opportunities are used. These students tend to keep up with current events.

"C" students miss one or two classes during the semester, usually excused. They read the assigned textbook chapters and some of the optional readings on reserve in the library just before the material is covered on the exam. Written assignments and exams usually exhibit proper style and formatting, but they do not always integrate strategic planning and targeting and are not always well organized or written precisely and concisely. All materials are turned in on time, and most rewrite opportunities are used. These students sometimes keep up with current events.

"D" students miss three or more classes during the semester and skim assigned readings. Written assignments and exams usually exhibit proper style and formatting, but they often lack integrated strategic planning and targeting and are often not well organized or written precisely and concisely. Materials are not always turned in on time; only some rewrite opportunities are used. Class participation is lacking, and they don't keep up with current events.

"F" students fail to come to class on a regular basis. They miss exams and written assignments, do not actively participate in class discussions, and fail to participate in presentations.

**Class Attendance and (Un)Excused Absences:** Class attendance is vital for proper crisis preparation and team contribution in 533 Crisis Communication. Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 4 points from the Attendance grade. Excused absences are accompanied by a written notification and explanation from an authorized University or MJ-school department for related activities that require an absence from class.

**Projects/Exams:** A Crisis Communication Plan (final project) and two exams (a midterm and a final) will be given. The midterm exam will be a 75-minute Crisis Communication review and analysis. The final exam will be a 90-minute comprehensive exam that covers the entire semester. Failure to show up for the midterm exam or to make prior arrangements will result in a grade of F. Failure to take the final will result in an AB. Textbooks, readings, in-class discussions and guest lectures will be covered in the exams. NOTE: You should plan to take notes (follow along on your computers) in class as the lecture expands beyond the textbook and information posted on Sakai.

Work handed in by students is expected to be as professional as possible. That includes presentation of material (grammar, spelling, editing, etc.) as well as the quality of ideas. Papers and exams will be graded accordingly with points taken off for poor writing or poor organization, grammar and spelling.

**NOTE: All assignments must be typed.**

**Graduate Students:** Students enrolled at the graduate level will be expected to conduct additional research on a topical Crisis Case Study and then manage an in-class press conference demonstrating the recommended messaging strategy to support the Crisis Communication process. Undergraduate students will serve as the media pool and will be instructed to ask questions regarding the messaging strategy and crisis communication plan.

**Sakai:** I encourage you to use the Sakai Discussion Board feature to discuss client issues among your peers. This is an effective way to ask questions, find out who faces similar challenges/opportunities and share successes. Additionally, all other handouts are/will be posted on Sakai for your convenience. Please consult these materials and use this resource to ensure production of quality case studies and communication tools in this class.

#### **Honor code:**

It is expected that each student in this class will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system. All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class, which includes written book reviews, and communication plans. Use of former students' book review(s) constitutes a breach of the honor code and will be dealt with accordingly. It is the responsibility of each student to abide by the UNC Honor Code, which prohibits **plagiarism**, lying, cheating or stealing when these actions involve academic processes or University, student or academic personnel acting in an official capacity; and the Campus Code, which prohibits students from significantly impairing the welfare or educational opportunities of others in the University community. If you haven't read the code in a while, please revisit and honor it!

#### **Diversity:**

The University's policy statements on Equal Educational Opportunity and Nondiscrimination as outlined in the *2013-2014 Undergraduate Bulletin*. <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/intro.html>. The University does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression or disabilities. If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let me know as soon as possible. If you need assistance or ADHD/LD services from The Learning Center please contact them at 919-962-7227 or <http://learningcenter.unc.edu/>

**NOTE: Please, come talk to me at any time if you have questions or concerns about the course. My objective for the course is to make it a positive learning experience, admittedly through your hard work. I am a resource available for your assistance—and want to see you succeed.**

## **BOOK REVIEW FORMAT**

Each student must read a recently published book (copyright after 2010) and complete a Book Review that discusses a topic related to a Crisis Communication issue or case study. It can support your semester crisis project or be totally different. The instructor must approve book selections in advance in order to satisfy the requirement. Book Reviews should be at least 750 words in length (not including citations), typed and double-spaced. They will be graded in three parts:

Part 1. Synopsis of Crisis situation/facts to include identifying stakeholders (20 points);

Part 2. Analysis of Crisis and (retrospective) Recommended Crisis Management strategies; include course terminology from textbook and lectures (50 points); and

Part 3. Spelling, grammar and editing of Book Review, following these instructions (30 points).

Book reviews should be typed, double-spaced and 750 words in length. Use the heading format below to include the title, editor or author, publisher, copyright date, number of pages in book, price and pbk for paperback or hbk for hardback. Be sure to include a recommendation on whether or not the book is appropriate as supplemental reading for future Crisis Communication courses. Additionally, the book review must be read, peer reviewed (edited) and initialed by at least one other student in the class prior to turning in the final draft.

### Sample Book Review Heading:

*Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama* by Daniel Kriess, Oxford University Press, 2012. 248 pp. \$ 24.95 pbk.

Pay attention to quality journalistic writing as well. Points will be taken off for poor editing and/or grammar, weak organization of ideas and spelling errors. **A grading scale similar to MEJO 153 Newswriting and MEJO 332 Public Relations Writing will be applied.** Clear, succinct and accurate writing is just as important to a public relations professional as it is to a journalist. Be sure that you don't plagiarize material; provide source citations. Remember, if you use an idea from the book, please attribute it to the text's authors.

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## **ACEJMC Professional Values and Competencies**

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The UNC School of Journalism and Media's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies included in the above link.

**Specifically, 533 Crisis Communication aligns with the following values of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) and expects students to:**

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

## General J-School Guidelines

### ATTENDANCE:

#### University Policy:

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by Accessibility Resources and Service and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the Office of the Dean of Students, Gender Violence Service Coordinators, and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC).

#### Class Policy:

Please communicate with me early about potential absences. Please be aware that you are bound by the Honor Code when making a request for a University approved absence.

(source: <http://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/attendance-grading-examination/>)

#### HONOR CODE:

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean C. A. Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

#### Syllabus Changes

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

#### ARS

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email [ars@unc.edu](mailto:ars@unc.edu).

(source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

#### Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs.

Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

#### TITLE IX

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community.

Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the

University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – [titleixcoordinator@unc.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu).

## POLICY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu)) or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office, or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

## DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The J-School has adopted diversity and inclusion mission and vision statements with accompanying goals. These complement the University policy on prohibiting harassment and discrimination. In summary, UNC-CH is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies.

## 533 Crisis Communication – Weekly Class Schedule

**\*\*As is the nature of Crisis, this schedule is very, very likely to change... to the worst-case scenario! \*\***

Date	Topic and Assignments
	<p><b><i>*Read all textbook chapters and online reference materials in advance and be prepared to discuss at the beginning of class.</i></b></p>
Week 1 8/16-8/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Welcome &amp; Introductions! Review and discuss syllabus and “Ongoing Crisis Communication” (OCC) textbook. Students should read syllabus in advance, and be prepared to discuss the Preface and a current crisis for Tabletop Crisis Exercises.</li> <li>● Crisis du jour – let’s be surprised! [Read and watch the news – pay attention to companies or individuals in crisis]</li> </ul>
Week 2 8/23-8/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Crisis Communication team/project assignments; plan to follow and update class on your assigned crisis throughout the semester.</li> <li>● Class Discussion on current U.S. and International crises.</li> <li>● Coombs, Chapter 1 “A Need for More Crisis Management Knowledge”</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Begin online FEMA/NIMS course IS-700.b</li> <li>● Submit book title for Crisis Communication Book Review</li> <li>● Turn in writing assignment identifying and explaining a current crisis, based on the Coombs textbook definition. Include a Situation Analysis, crisis overview, relevant stakeholder audiences and the current crisis communication media response.</li> </ul>
Week 3 8/30-9/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coombs, Chapter 6 “Recognizing Crises”</li> <li>● Crisis Tabletop Exercises (topic TBD based on news cycle). Focus on crisis situations that involve natural disasters and non-manmade events; resulting in significant loss of life and property.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In-class discussion, presentation and analysis of current crisis situations affecting local, regional and national organizations. Coombs, Chapter 7 - “Crisis Responding”</li> <li>● Current events and Crisis Communication class discussion.</li> </ul>
Week 4 <b>9/6 – No Class</b>	<i>Well-being Day</i>
9/6-9/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Crisis Tabletop Exercises (topic TBD based on news cycle). Focus on crisis situations that involve scandal and salacious/embarrassing personal conduct.</li> <li>● Class Discussion &amp; Mock Presentations: Art of the Apology</li> <li>● Class Discussion: Body Language and Nonverbal Communication</li> </ul>
Week 5 9/13-9/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Crisis Tabletop Exercises (topic TBD based on news cycle). Focus on crisis situations that involve racial tensions or divisive topics; also include manmade crises that result in loss of life.</li> <li>● Coombs, Chapter 2 “Risk as the Foundation for Crisis Management and Crisis Communication”</li> <li>● Class Discussion: Managing Hostile Audiences/Guilty Clients</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Crisis Tabletop Exercises (topic TBD based on news cycle). Focus on crisis situations that involve political, financial, hacking and other engineered events.</li> <li>● Coombs, Chapter 3 “The Crisis Mitigation Process: Building Crisis Resistant Organizations”</li> <li>● Class Discussion &amp; Mock Presentations: High-Pressure Live Broadcasts</li> </ul>
Week 6 9/20-9/22	<b>Film Screening:</b> Crisis Communication and Reputation Management
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Crisis Tabletop Exercises (topic TBD based on news cycle). Focus on crisis situations that involve celebrities or high-profile individuals.</li> <li>● Coombs, Chapter 4 “Crisis Preparing, Part I”</li> <li>● Class Discussion: film analysis and critique</li> </ul>
Week 7 9/27-9/29	<b>Book Reviews Due;</b> begin sharing book review presentations. Media Q&A sessions
	<b>Book Reviews;</b> book review presentations. Coombs, Chapter 5 “Crisis Preparing, Part II” Media Q&A sessions
Week 8 10/4-10/6	<b>Book Reviews</b> presentations Coombs, Chapter 8 “Postcrisis Concerns”
Week 9 10/11-10/13	<b>Book Reviews</b> presentations wrap-up & review  Midterm Exam review
Week 10 10/18-10/20	<b>10/18 - Midterm Exam</b> and FEMA/NIMS <b>online course certificate due</b> <b>FALL BREAK – NO CLASS ON 10/20</b>
<i>Fall Break on 10/20-10/21</i>	
Week 11 10/25-10/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduction to Crisis Communication research, planning and development</li> <li>● Sample Crisis Case – press conference review &amp; critique</li> <li>● Crisis Communication Case Study – class discussion (Review Sample Plans)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Begin work on Crisis Communication Media Kit content and CrisisComm Social Media Plan [News Releases, Media Advisories, Speeches, Fact Sheets, Talking Points...] (Review Sample Plans)</li> <li>● Group Work: Media Q&amp;A Development and Media Prep/Coaching</li> </ul>
Week 12 11/1-11/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work on Crisis Communication Media Kit content and CrisisComm Social Media Guide and Plan</li> <li>● Group Work: Media Q&amp;A Development and Media Prep/Coaching</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work on Crisis Comm Media Kit content</li> <li>● Group Work: Media Q&amp;A Development and Media Prep/Coaching</li> </ul>
Week 13 11/8-11/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work on Crisis Comm Media Kit content</li> <li>● Group Work: Media Q&amp;A Development and Media Prep/Coaching</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work on Crisis Comm Media Kit content, presentations, Media Q&amp;A and Press Conference Itinerary &amp; Press Conference Run-Thrus</li> </ul>
<b>Press Conference</b> <b>Friday, 11/11/21</b>	<b>PRESS CONFERENCE</b> w/Reporters and Media/Communication Professionals



Week 14 11/15-11/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Debrief on Press Conference and Work on Team Crisis Communication Plan</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work on Team Crisis Communication Plan</li> </ul>
Week 15 11/22-11/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work on Team Crisis Communication Plan</li> </ul>
11/24 - <i>No Class</i>	<b>THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS ON 11/24</b>
Week 16 11/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Last Day of Class; Final Exam review and turn in Crisis Communication Plan</li> </ul>

Tuesday – Dec. 6

**FINAL EXAM – 12:00 p.m.**  
 Crisis Comm 533, Section 001 (*Meets weekly at 2:00 p.m. – T/Th*)