

533.001 – Crisis Communication – Fall 2024

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| Instructor: Professor Valerie “VK” Fields | Classroom: CA 143 |
| Office: Carroll 229 | Time: Sect. 001 T/Th 12:30-1:45 p.m. |
| E-mail: vfields@email.unc.edu | Hours: By Appointment - Zoom |

IMPORTANT: This course will be taught in person. Students are expected to complete and submit all assignments by the stated deadlines given through digital uploads within Canvas, using the Assignments tab or completing Tests & Quizzes online via Canvas. Let’s continue to be smart and stay 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 you should have successfully completed MEJO 153 “News Writing and MEJO 137 “Principles of Advertising and Public Relations” – for the most success on assignments.

Required Texts: *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding*, Sixth Edition (2023). W. Timothy Coombs. Sage Publications. Hardcopy or Digital Copy is acceptable: ISBN: 9781071816646 | 9781071816639.

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 Assignments | 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 Canvas.

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.

Canvas: I encourage you to use the Canvas 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 Canvas 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/>

UNC-Chapel Hill Policy for Use of Artificial Intelligence:

<https://provost.unc.edu/student-generative-ai-usage-guidance/>

Use of generative AI in your coursework is based on the following principles:

1. **AI should help you think.** Not think for you.

Use these tools to give you ideas, perform research (in compliance with point 2 below), and analyze problems.

Do not use AI to do your work for you, (i.e., do not enter an assignment question or writing prompt

into ChatGPT and copy & paste the response as your answer).

2. **Engage with AI Responsibly and Ethically:** Engage with AI technologies responsibly, critically evaluating AI-generated outputs and considering potential biases, limitations, and ethical implications in your analysis and discussions. Utilize AI technologies ethically, respecting privacy, confidentiality, and intellectual property rights.
3. **You are 100% responsible for your final product.**
You are the user. If the AI makes a mistake, and you use it, it's your mistake. If you don't know whether a statement about any item in the output is true, then your responsibility is to research it. If you cannot verify it as factual, you should delete it. You hold full responsibility for AI-generated content as if you had produced the materials yourself. This means ideas must be attributed, facts are true, and sources must be verified. **You must document all uses of AI for assignments in MEJO 533 and include a link to the prompts and outputs submitted for class. Not adhering to these guidelines will result in penalties on the assignment and reporting possible UNC Honor Code violations.**

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 Hussman 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.

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 |
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| | <i>*Read all textbook chapters and online reference materials in advance and be prepared to discuss at the beginning of class.</i> |
| Week 1 Aug. 20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Welcome & 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. ● Mini mock press conferences on current event crises in the news. |
| Week 2 Aug. 27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crisis Communication team/project assignments; plan to follow and update class on your assigned crisis throughout the semester. ● Class Discussion on current U.S. and International crises. ● Coombs, Chapter 1 “A Need for More Crisis Management Knowledge” |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begin online FEMA/NIMS course IS-700.b ● Submit book title for Crisis Communication Book Review ● 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. |
| Week 3 | Tuesday, Sept. 3 – NO CLASS (UNC-CH Well-being Day) |
| Sept. 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coombs, Chapter 6 “Recognizing Crises” ● 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. |
| Week 4 Sept. 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In-class discussion, presentation and analysis of current crisis situations affecting local, regional and national organizations. Coombs, Chapter 7 - “Crisis Responding” ● Current events and Crisis Communication class discussion. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crisis Tabletop Exercises (topic TBD based on news cycle). Focus on crisis situations that involve scandal and salacious/embarrassing personal conduct. ● Class Discussion & Mock Presentations: Art of the Apology ● Class Discussion: Body Language and Nonverbal Communication |
| Week 5 Sept. 17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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. ● Coombs, Chapter 2 “Risk as the Foundation for Crisis Management and Crisis Communication” ● Class Discussion: Managing Hostile Audiences/Guilty Clients |
| | Film Screening: Crisis Communication and Reputation Management |

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| Week 6 Sept. 24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crisis Tabletop Exercises (topic TBD based on news cycle). Focus on crisis situations that involve political, financial, hacking and other engineered events. ● Coombs, Chapter 3 “The Crisis Mitigation Process: Building Crisis Resistant Organizations” ● Class Discussion & Mock Presentations: High-Pressure Live Broadcasts |
| Week 7 Oct. 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crisis Tabletop Exercises (topic TBD based on news cycle). Focus on crisis situations that involve celebrities or high-profile individuals. ● Coombs, Chapter 4 “Crisis Preparing, Part I” ● Class Discussion: film analysis and critique |
| | Book Reviews Due ; begin sharing book review presentations. Media Q&A sessions |
| Week 8 Oct. 8 | Book Reviews ; book review presentations. Coombs, Chapter 5 “Crisis Preparing, Part II” Media Q&A sessions |
| | Book Reviews presentations wrap-up and Midterm exam review Coombs, Chapter 8 “Postcrisis Concerns” |
| Week 9 Oct. 15 | Midterm Exam and FEMA/NIMS online course certificate due |
| | Thursday, Oct. 17 – NO CLASS (Fall Break) |
| Week 10 Oct. 22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction to Crisis Communication research, planning and development ● Sample Crisis Case – press conference review & critique ● Crisis Communication Case Study – class discussion (Review Sample Plans) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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) ● Group Work: Media Q&A Development and Media Prep/Coaching |
| Week 11 Oct. 29 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work on Crisis Communication Media Kit content and CrisisComm Social Media Guide and Plan ● Group Work: Media Q&A Development and Media Prep/Coaching |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work on Crisis Comm Media Kit content ● Group Work: Media Q&A Development and Media Prep/Coaching |
| Week 12 Nov. 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work on Crisis Comm Media Kit content ● Group Work: Media Q&A Development and Media Prep/Coaching |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work on Crisis Comm Media Kit content, presentations, Media Q&A and Press Conference Itinerary & Press Conference Run-Thrus ● Group Work: Media Q&A Development and Media Prep/Coaching |
| Week 13 Nov. 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work on Crisis Comm Media Kit content, presentations, Media Q&A and Press Conference Itinerary |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press Conference Run-Thru(s) and Media Relations/Media Mgmt. |
| Press Conference Friday, Nov. 15 10:00 a.m. | PRESS CONFERENCE w/Reporters and Media/Communication Professionals Carroll Hall 305 - Freedom Forum |
| Week 14 Nov. 19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief on Press Conference and Work on Team Crisis Communication Plan |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on Team Crisis Communication Plan |
| Week 15 Nov. 26 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on Team Crisis Communication Plan |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thursday, Nov. 28 – NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Holiday) |
| Week 16 Dec. 3 LDOC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize Team Crisis Communication Plan • Last Day of Class; Final Exam review and submit Crisis Communication Plan |

MONDAY, DEC. 9 FINAL EXAM – 4:00 p.m.

Crisis Comm 533, Section 001 (*Meets weekly at 12:30 p.m. – T/Th*)