MPPR 810-01 Corporate Crisis Communications
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-Public Relations and Corporate Communications
Thursday, 5:20 p.m. - 7:50 p.m., Spring 2015
Instructors: E. Bruce Harrison and Judith Muhlberg
Downtown campus, Room C204
• Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW
The course provides an advanced learning opportunity in corporate crisis analysis, response and management, from the perspective of the chief communication officer (CCO). Note: This course is focused on corporations. It is not intended to deal with government crises (CDC, FDA or other government ordered recalls), except as they affect and are dealt with by the corporations facing the crises. Course participants will assume a CCO perspective to analyze “corporate crisis” situations, understand and create communication strategies designed for best achievable outcomes. Case studies, guest lectures and participative exercises will be used. The following guide will help provide focus for individual assessment and class discussion.

CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS CRISIS GUIDE

1. What IS a corporate crisis? The class will agree on a common definition of a corporate communication crisis. This will help determine further analyses, strategies and plan execution.
2. What are the CAUSES of business crises?
3. What PRE-CRISES INTELLIGENCE tools can be deployed to predict business crises?
4. What RISKS are posed to the business?
5. What are the BEST PRACTICES leading corporations employ to prepare the company to handle a crisis (communications plan, training, preparedness team, etc.)?
6. What are the specific REPUTATION RISKS?
7. Who are the STAKEHOLDERS impacted by the crisis?
8. What are the basic COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES?
9. What are the KEY MESSAGES for each stakeholder group?
10. What is the turning point of a crisis (CLIMAX)?
11. Did the company win, lose or stabilize stakeholder trust (REPUTATION)?
12. What steps did the company take as the result of this crisis to protect/restore its reputation (NEW COMMITMENTS)?
13. What are the LESSONS LEARNED through this crisis?

COURSE OBJECTIVES
This course is intended to provide an understanding of the framework and tools necessary to develop the expertise and confidence to successfully handle communication responsibilities in a corporate crisis situation. Through analysis of case studies and scenario challenges, you will be asked to think strategically, develop robust, proactive plans and make recommendations to solve crisis-related business challenges through corporate communications. In addition, corporate communication officers (CCOs) and other business professionals will be invited into the class to present crisis case histories and
to engage with class members in discussing communication strategies. Lessons directly relevant to modern corporate communication will be taught through class interaction, role-playing, and a series of individual and group assignments—both writing and stand-up presentation exercises.

REQUIRED READING
Title: *Leadership Communication: How Leaders Communicate and How Communicators Lead in Today's Global Enterprise*
Authors: E. Bruce Harrison and Judith Muhlberg
Year: 2014
Price: $39.56 (Paperback); $19.95 (Kindle Edition). (Available from sales@businessexpertpress.com or www.Amazon.com)

Title: *Damage Control (Revised & Updated): The Essential Lessons of Crisis Management*
Authors: Eric Dezenhall and John Weber
ISBN: 978-1-935212-24-9 (Paperback); 978-1-935212-25-6 (e-book)
Publisher: Penguin Group, New York
Year: 2011

You also will be asked to access, read and discuss a number of relevant articles that will be available on our class online connection.

Because the business environment is constantly changing, all corporate crisis communications participants should be reading *The Washington Post, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Financial Times* either as newspapers or online, as well as business publications such as *BusinessWeek, Fortune, Harvard Business Review,* and the *Economist.*

You will also be expected to use online research tools for your Pre-Crisis Intelligence Project (PIP), one of the four assignments on which you will be graded.

ATTENDANCE
As outlined by the university, missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). **Absences for classes, beyond the initial two, will result in further reduction of the final grade.** If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

Punctual attendance is critical. If you have to miss a class – family emergency, medical emergency or other act of God – you must let the instructors know in advance and work out a proposal for making up whatever work you will miss. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND OTHER GUIDELINES
A successful class depends on the active engagement of all students. Students should turn off all cell phones, pagers or other communication devices while in class. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of others’ views and opinions. What happens in class stays in class unless you receive
permission from the instructor to share something.

**If you need to miss class:** The assignment is due before class begins.

**Late work:** If you turn in an assignment late, you will receive **one-half letter grade lower for each day it is late.** If you have extenuating circumstances or need special accommodations, please let us know in advance of the due date, and we will try to accommodate your needs.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

Your grade for the semester will be based on your performance in six areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PIP</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAO</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Crises</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Simulation</td>
<td>5</td>
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**TOTAL** 100

1. **PIP:** A paper or papers (3-5 pages) based on your **Pre-Crisis Intelligence Project (PIP).** The paper will (a) explain the PIP purpose and the procedure you used to detect, log and categorize symptoms (pre-crisis developments) in your assigned PIP company; (b) analyze the findings of your scans over a period of at least 30 days, to detect a trend line of symptoms related to the company; and (c) apply your findings to predict a possible/probable crisis outcome if the trend line continues. Your paper should point to crisis outcomes that can be addressed by crisis communications strategies, but it is not necessary in this paper to recommend such strategies. (Note that only one paper, which should be submitted at the end of the first 30 days of the PIP, is **required for a grade;** however, this paper may subsequently be revised and re-submitted as many as three times during the course -- each 30 days -- with the last submitted version scored for grade point value.) In our experience, most students decide to submit 3 papers over the 90-day period.

   This project paper is worth **25 points.**

2. **BAO:** A position paper (5-7 pages) focused on a **Best Achievable Outcome (BAO)** that will analyze a crisis case study covered during the course (either in the course reading materials or a **case presented by one of the class guest lecturers**), and will suggest how that “historic crisis” might have been affected by modern or current circumstances and technologies. To satisfy this assignment for a grade, you will select a crisis case study from those covered in class or in assigned texts, briefly analyze the cause, response and communication strategy elements in the selected crisis studied. You will then—using your knowledge of current business, political and other relevant conditions, your knowledge of outcomes in crises since the selected crisis, your understanding of the availability, use and impact of current information and outreach channels
(e.g., social media), and any other relatable factors—suggest how the crisis might have developed, and provide effective current communication strategies for a BAO if the crisis occurred “today.”

This paper is worth 20 points.

3. **2 CRISSES:** An analytical graphic (e.g., chart or table) accompanied by a discussion paper (3-5 pages), that compares and contrasts two of the crisis situations presented by guest speakers, text books or class discussions. The graphic and paper will cite and analyze cause, risk, stakeholders, and other implications in each of the situations; list and analyze the apparent effectiveness of communications strategies in reaching BAOs; identify the turning point or climax; comment on reputation loss or win; learnings from the crisis; and commitments or steps taken as the result of the crisis.

This assignment is worth 20 points.

4. **FINAL:** The final assignment for grade is your Crisis Communications Plan Presentation. To satisfy this assignment for grade, you will select one of the following: (A) a crisis situation involving a company that was examined in class (which could be the case study in your BAO paper); or (B) research findings and implications of a company developed in your PIP paper. You will then prepare and deliver to the class and faculty a 10-minute Power Point presentation, describing cause, risk, stakeholders, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and other implications, and recommending to the “audience” (fellow class members and instructors, assumed to be representatives of the company) a clear, focused and robust crisis communications action plan—with specifics on engaging the essential elements of crisis communications covered in this course.

This plan/presentation is worth 20 points.

5. **PARTICIPATION:** In-class participation and contributions to our class blog (a Facebook page that will be established in the first week of class)

This participation is worth: 10 points.

6. **CRISIS SIMULATION:** A crisis simulation will be conducted during the semester. Attendance is mandatory, and your individual and team response to the crisis scenario will be evaluated.

This assignment is worth: 5 points.

**GRADING**

**Submission/Presentation/Grading of Work:** Communications is a “deadline-driven” profession. You are expected to submit accurate, high-quality, executive-level presentation work on time. **YOU MUST PROVIDE A PRINTED, HARD COPY OF EACH ASSIGNMENT.** This copy should be given to the instructors on or before the deadline. You are also asked to provide an electronic version to the instructors on or before the deadline. *Papers submitted not meeting these requirements will lose points.*
APPEARANCE COUNTS! Submitted assignments must follow a specific format. All written assignments should be typed in 12-point font, 1.5-spaced using one-inch margins with correct spelling and grammar. Please include your name, assignment title and the date on each page of all written submissions. Papers submitted not meeting these requirements will lose points.

Title pages, inserts, graphs and tables should be simple, executive-style presentations. The use of color should be eliminated or limited to instances, such as graphs, where color is necessary. No ‘drop-out’ type (e.g., white letters on a black or colored background) is permitted. Any mistake in proofing, grammar or spelling will result in one-half letter grade lower than the content would merit.

All assignments will be graded based on the following criteria:

- **Professionalism** – concise, clearly stated, free of errors.
- **Qualities of thinking** – ideas are based on research or best practices; assignment demonstrates solid, strategic thinking.
- **Quality of execution** – in competitive corporate environments, delivering what’s required is different than delivering what’s expected. You have the opportunity to take each assigned “project” and demonstrate star quality.
- **Creativity** – strategies and tactics are thoughtful, targeted, measurable, and will reach and engage the target stakeholders to take action.
- **Executive Ready** – Your “assignment” is written in a business format for your CEO, CCO and other senior executives to review and approve

Total 100 points

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. There are no grades of C+, C- or D. The Grading Scale is as follows:

- A 100-93
- A- 92-90
- B+ 89-88
- B 87-83
- B- 82-80
- C 79-70
- F 69.9 and below

The instructors will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a poor final grade.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES
Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:

- MPS Writing Resource Program
  202-687-4246
  http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY
Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM
All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

PLAGIARISM
Stealing someone else’s work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as “the act of passing off as one’s own the ideas or writings of another.” More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out http://www.plagiarism.org.

SYLLABUS MODIFICATION
The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of the agenda. The instructors will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Guest Lecturers will enhance the course by bringing their experiences in managing crises to the classroom. A schedule of outside lecturers and the class assignments will be provided on the first day of class, January 8th. Below is a preliminary outline of the semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 January 8</td>
<td>Semester Overview: The Big Picture of Corporate Crisis Communication</td>
<td>PIP Companies Assigned; Read Chapters 1-2 Damage Control</td>
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<td>2 January 15</td>
<td>Class Definition of Corporate Crisis</td>
<td>Read Chapter 11 Leadership in Communication</td>
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<td>3 January 22</td>
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<td>Read Chapter 13 Leadership in Communication</td>
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<td>4 January 29</td>
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<td>PIP#1 Due; Read Chapters 3-6 Damage Control; Chapter 12 Leadership in Communication</td>
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<td>5 February 5</td>
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<td>Read Chapters 7-10 Damage Control</td>
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<td>6 February 12</td>
<td>Case Studies of the Classics</td>
<td>BAO Due; Read Chapters 11-13 Damage Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 February 19</td>
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<td>Read Chapters 14-15 Damage Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 February 26</td>
<td>“In the Hot Seat”: Role Play</td>
<td>PIP#2 Due; Divide into teams for the Final Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 March 5</td>
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<td>Read Chapters 16-17 Damage Control</td>
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<td>10 March 12</td>
<td>Spring Break – NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 March 19</td>
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<td>Read Chapter 18 Damage Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 March 26</td>
<td></td>
<td>PIP#3 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 April 3</td>
<td>NO CLASS – EASTER BREAK</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 April 9</td>
<td>Case Studies of the Classics</td>
<td>2 Crises Due</td>
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<td>15 April 16</td>
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<td>16 April 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 May 7</td>
<td>Final Presentations</td>
<td>Final Presentations Due</td>
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We will also apply readings, case studies and discussions on strategy and leadership to further enable your knowledge of corporate crisis communications and your ability to think as a CCO in an enterprise executive capacity,形成ng and guiding effective leadership communication.

Professional Standards and Values: Please review and understand the Arthur W. Page Society Principles. Many of the guest speakers are our colleagues in this important leadership organization. In the index of our textbook, Leadership Communication (Business Expert Press), you will find references to Arthur W. Page Society, and AWPS. For direct access to the Page Society and the Page Principles, see
Useful professional guidance within the context of this course is also found within the PRSA Member Statement of Professional Values and Ethics Pledge (www.prsa.org), and the IABC Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators (http://www.iabc.com/about/code.htm).

References:
- Fame and Fortune: How Successful Companies Build Corporate Reputations, by Charles Fombrun and Cees Van Riel, Financial Times/Prentice-Hall, 2004
- Crisis Response, edited by Jack Gottschalk, Gale Research, 1993
- Strategic Reputation Risk Management, by Judy Larkin, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003
- Communicating When Your Company is Under Siege: Surviving Public Crisis, by Marion K. Pinsdorf, Lexington Books, 1987
- The Resilient Enterprise, by Yossi Sheffi, MIT Press, 2005
- Going Green: How to Communicate Your Company’s Environmental Commitment, by E. Bruce Harrison, Business One Irwin, 1993
- Seven Lessons for Leading in Crisis, by Bill George, Jossey-Bass (Wiley), 2009

Composed by faculty, Crisis Communications: E. Bruce Harrison and Judith Muhlberg