

# Crisis Communication

PBRL 4421-001

Spring 2021

Class Meeting: M 5:30-8:30 p.m., VIRTUAL

Prof. Beth Wilson, MBA, APR

Office Hours: Not on campus and by appointment only

Email: [bethbwilson@gmail.com](mailto:bethbwilson@gmail.com) or [eblose@memphis.edu](mailto:eblose@memphis.edu)

Twitter: [@bethbwilson901](https://twitter.com/bethbwilson901)

If you have questions on course content or assignments, please use the Discussions forum on eCourseware or email me directly. If you think your question could be helpful for other students as well, please use the Discussion forum "General Course Questions," so that everyone can see your question and my answer.

You may contact me at any time with questions via any of the means listed above. Your success in this class will be determined by the amount of effort that you put into it. If you are unsure about something or would like to better understand a topic or assignment, reaching out is always the best idea.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog Description

This course explores theories and research related to public relations communication before, during and after a crisis; and examines the fundamentals of organizational communication, crisis management and strategic planning.

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

There is no standard textbook for the course. All of the readings will come from scholarly communication articles (all of which will be provided for you via eCourseware) and contemporary news articles relating to the topic being discussed that day. You will also be expected to stay current with major daily newspapers or websites (i.e., *The Commercial Appeal*, *The New York Times*, *Daily Memphian*, etc.) and be conversant with **breaking news having public relations, crisis management or critical thinking implications**.

### *Recommended*

Agnes, Melissa, *Crisis Ready*. 2018. Mascot Books.

*Associated Press Stylebook*. 2020 Edition.

### Classroom Format

This class will meet virtually by Zoom in the scheduled timeslot. The class will include lecture, discussion and in-class/break-out activities. You can expect a casual and informal environment, in which we learn about crisis communication through group discussions and applications. Communications professionals will be featured as guest speakers during a few classes throughout the semester.

## Participation

We will all benefit from class discussions and collaborative efforts in our study of crisis communication and management. Your class participation and collaboration are not only appreciated, but they are also expected. Class participation will be graded on a class-by-class basis. Your participation assessment is based on the extent that I can see that you are understanding the materials and keeping current with the assigned readings and assignments. Toward this objective, please come to class prepared and ready to respond if called upon.

## Accessing the Course Website

1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: <http://elearn.memphis.edu>.
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for PBRL 4421-001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

## Course Requirements

### *Assignments*

- Students should use their best writing for assignments, as they are worth a good percentage of your grade.
- Your name should be at the top of the first page. You don't need a cover sheet, except for the crisis simulation response plan.
- Assignments should be written in third person and using AP style.
- Be clear and concise in your writing.
- All work should be turned in as a Word document via Dropbox on eCourseware, unless otherwise noted.
- All work must be uploaded to Dropbox on eCourseware by 5:30 p.m. CT on the assigned Monday, unless otherwise noted.
- More detail will be provided in class and on eCourseware. Deadlines are also listed under the Course Schedule.

### *Crisis News Presentations*

Each student will present a mini-crisis case study and lead a discussion. These will be concise presentations (ideally 10 minutes) that should follow this format:

- Name of case
- Timeframe (must be within three months of presentation date)
- What the organization did or was accused of doing
- Context and social forces at play
- How the story broke
- The organization's initial response and effectiveness
- Key events
- Resolution
- Lessons learned/legacy

Additional details will be provided separately.

### *Crisis Simulation Response Plan*

The class will be divided into working groups for a crisis simulation that will involve a presentation and a written report. Details will be provided separately.

### *Quizzes*

Quizzes will be given throughout the semester to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings and other assignments. Quizzes will be announced in class and via eCourseware. Missed quizzes cannot be made up.

### **Grading**

There are 1,000 possible points in this class. At the end of the semester, your class points will be calculated and rounded up to the nearest whole number. Letter grades will be determined according to the scale below. If additional points are added or subtracted from this possible point total, students will be provided with an updated point to letter grade scale.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Quizzes (4 – 50 points each)            | 200 points                             |
| Crisis News Presentation                | 150 points                             |
| Crisis News Paper                       | 100 points                             |
| Crisis Simulation Response Paper        | 200 points (100 group, 100 individual) |
| Crisis Simulation Response Presentation | 150 points                             |
| Class Participation                     | 200 points                             |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>1,000 points</b>                    |

**A** = 900-1,000 points

**B** = 800-899 points

**C** = 700-799 points

**D** = 600-699 points

**F** = 600 and fewer points

### *Grading Philosophy*

- A: Professional quality work that could be use with little or no modification
- B: Good to excellent work and exceeds requirement, but would require revision to be used professionally
- C: Satisfactory work and adequately meets requirement, but would need significant revision
- D: Barely satisfies minimum requirement and below average quality
- F: Unsatisfactory work and does not meet minimum requirement.

### **Other Issues**

#### *Contacting me*

The best and quickest way to contact me is via email ([bethbwilson@gmail.com](mailto:bethbwilson@gmail.com)). Do not use the email within eCourseware, use my Gmail. I will respond to email within 24-48 hours. If you have a problem, do

not let it escalate over time. Contact me ASAP.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

*Content and dates may be adjusted throughout the semester. I will let you know in advance via email and on eCourseware.*

*Week 1, January 25: Introduction to crisis communication and the course*

- Your thoughts around crisis
- Foundations, principles and definitions

*Week 2, February 8: Strategic management approach to crisis communication*

- People first
- Crisis communication research and planning

*Week 3, February 1: Crisis theories and misunderstandings*

- Chaos and complexity theories, and the use of theory in crisis communication
- Living in the real world

*Week 4, February 15: To be or not to be a crisis*

- Managing uncertainty

*Week 5, February 22: Planning for crises and acting on “purposeful” purpose*

- Case studies on proactive planning and environmental scanning
- “Crisis Ready” flowchart
- **CRISIS NEWS ASSIGNMENT DUE**

*Week 6, March 1: Traditional and new media*

- Channel selection and the use of social media in a crisis
- Differences and understandings of a variety of channels and media options

*Week 7, March 8: NO CLASS (Wellness Break)*

*Week 8, March 15: When to talk and when to shut up*

- “No comment” is NOT an option
- Work on Crisis Simulation Response presentation

*Week 9, March 22: The day after tomorrow*

- Resilience and learning through failure

*Week 10, March 29: Authenticity and overall reputation management*

- Begin with trust

*Week 11, April 5: Ethics and leadership*

- Lessons on effective crisis leadership (and keeping your cool)

- Responding to the ethical demands of a crisis

*Week 12, April 12: Controversies, public health, terrorism, natural disasters, community relations*

- The intersections of crisis, media, trolls, social capital and community

*Week 13, April 19: Building an invincible brand*

- Work on Crisis Simulation Response presentation

*Week 14, April 26: Crisis simulation and presentation*

## ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

### Five Pillars in PBRL 4421

- *Critical Thinking:* Students will work to develop an understanding of how to best respond in a crisis situation, how to determine target publics and messages, and how to balance all of those things in a delicate or disaster situation.
- *Media Literacy:* Students will increase their media literacy by looking at how to engage with a variety of traditional and social media, to see how crises can occur, grow and be stopped through these channels, and how to interact and engage with others in the media appropriately in order to move through a crisis situation effectively.
- *Multimedia:* Students look at the use of social media in crisis situations, as well as developing solid relationships with a variety of media personnel. Students in this class will work on material for both print and social media applications.
- *Professionalism:* Students will learn the professional needs and ethical obligations of public relations professionals during a variety of crisis situations. They will be exposed to a variety of ethical standards from both legal and professional organizations. Students will continue work on their personal portfolio site as a way of establishing their personal professional brand.
- *Writing:* Students will write a variety of materials for simulated crisis events, including press releases, press conference statements, posts for various social media platforms and learn theoretical understandings for creating more effective messages.

## Professional values and competencies for PBRL 4421

- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communication.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.

## How professional values and competencies will be met

### *Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand and think critically)*

- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audience to developing content for public relations, responding to public relations crises and using appropriate channels to reach the target audience.
- Recognize legal and ethical problems associated with public relations crises, including within the freedoms of speech and the press.
- Understand the differences between writing for various media.
- Attain familiarity with the broad range of theories in the field of crisis communication, as well as an understanding of how this body of theory and research has developed over the history of the field.
- Attain familiarity with the broad range of best practices and practical applications within crisis communication.

### *Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques and applied competencies)*

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and exams.
- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Practice breaking down academic research articles to their most important points to facilitate their understanding of the first steps in synthesizing a broad array of information.
- Lead and participate in class discussions that deepen their understanding of theories and how they apply to the real world.
- Be able to work effectively in a group.
- Complete a simulation of a crisis situation and respond effectively using various mass media channels.
- Be able to recognize and analyze crisis communication concepts and theories in crisis situations around them and in the news.

## How assessment of student learning will be met

### *Awareness*

- Learn the important role of writing in public relations, including journalistic news values, AP style and the various forms of writing for different media.

- Learn about the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audience when developing public relations content or responding to a public relations crisis.
- Learn about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations crisis situations.
- Learn about the importance of research and theory application and building in crisis communication.

#### *Understanding*

- Recognize how the diversity and cultural difference of an organization's stakeholders and target audience inform the development of public relations content.
- Recognize potential ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Understand how to recognize and apply theory and principles in crisis events around them.
- Understand how crisis communication best practices and principles are utilized and enacted.

#### *Application*

- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Participate in a crisis simulation, including a mock press conference, writing press releases, social media messages and building relationships with a variety of stakeholders.
- Be able to apply best practices and theoretical concepts to a variety of crisis case studies and a crisis simulation.

## **JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES**

### **Portfolio requirement**

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of their work. Undergraduate students are to begin the portfolio in JRSM 3900 and graduate students are to begin in JRSM 7002. Students are to contribute to it in every skills course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from courses and/or professional experiences and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in their capstone courses.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. Students may use any content management system, but students are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix or SquareSpace. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but they must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional lives, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)

- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files and writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

### Email

Students must have their UofM email accounts activated. Students using another provider, such as Google, are required to have all UofM email forwarded to that account. Students should go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UofM email. Students are required to check their email daily. They are responsible for complying with any email sent to by professors or others in the University.

### Electronic Devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

### Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism and Strategic Media. Students may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements with the class professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary).

Journalism and Strategic Media is a professional program, and students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students who have some problem making it to class on time should make arrangements to correct the problem or consider taking another class. Students should consider this class as a "job" in the educational process and be on time just as they would elsewhere.

### Course Repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade ("C-") in a class required by their program of study in Journalism and Strategic Media more than three times will be dropped from the program.

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor, and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student's online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo).

### Academic Integrity

In addition to University-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the



Department of Journalism and Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or students receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on their own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, as this is a journalism and strategic media class, students are expected to comply with copyright law and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas. Also, to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your work. Other instructions to follow may also be given. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all. (*Office of Legal Counsel, October 11, 2018*)

### **Online SETEs**

Students are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once the instructor has posted grades, student can immediately see that grade, provided they have completed a the SETE for that class. To access evaluation forms, students should log in to MyMemphis using their UUIDs and email passwords; click on the gray "Student" tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Student feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

### **AP Style and Grammar**

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. Students are responsible for learning these rules and checking their work for errors.

### **Disability and Accommodations**

Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

### **Diversity and Inclusivity**

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind. Media reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

## **Weather Policy**

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather. If the University is closed or classes are canceled, this course will not meet. However, students will still be responsible for that day's work.

## **Student Support**

Student who are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, should visit the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/saos/sos/crisis-resources.php>. Any student who faces personal challenges including, but not limited to securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support (901-678-2187) located in the University Center, Suite 359 for assistance. Students may also talk with course instructors about the challenges they are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting with campus or community support.

## **COVID-19 protocols for this course**

### **Student Accommodations**

Students with accessibility issues or learning accommodation issues due to a disability should contact Disability Resources for Students (DRS) to submit an official request for course accommodations. Contact DRS at 901.678.2880 or at [drs@memphis.edu](mailto:drs@memphis.edu). (<https://www.memphis.edu/drs/index.php>)

### **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited. Students guilty of academic misconduct, either directly or indirectly, through participation or assistance, are immediately responsible to the instructor of the class in addition to other possible disciplinary sanctions which may be imposed through the regular institutional disciplinary procedures. (<https://www.memphis.edu/osa/students/academic-misconduct.php>)

### **Student Health**

Students who have a positive COVID-19 test should contact the Dean of Students at [deanofstudents@memphis.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@memphis.edu).

### **Student Resources**

Students who need additional resources can visit the Dean of Students Office website at <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php>.

## **Guidelines for classes, labs and equipment in Meeman Journalism Building in Spring 2021**

- Anyone feeling sick should stay home and join class virtually.
- Social distance from all others at least 6 feet.
- Wear a mask at all times when in University buildings and on campus.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer regularly.
- No more than one person in the elevator at a time.
- Disinfect your workstation before and after use, including desks, keyboards, mice and screens. Wash your hands after cleaning.
- Have phone or Zoom meetings with professors and classmates. Do not meet face to face, if possible.