

Crisis Communication

PBRL 4421-001

Fall 2022

Class Meeting: MW - 2:20 - 3:45 p.m. MJ 112

Prof. Taylor Ackerman, MA

She/Her

Office: Meeman 332

Office hours: Monday, 10:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.

Tuesday, 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Wednesday, 12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

If you'd like to meet for my office hours listed or at any other time, please reach out via email prior to dropping by so I can make sure I'm in my office. I'm also available via Zoom outside of office hours. Please don't hesitate to reach out.

Email: tckerman@memphis.edu

Phone: 731-225-7656 (Text only please)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

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

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Coombes, T. (2018). *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding (5th ed.)* Thousand Oaks, CA. SAGE Publications. ISBN: 9781544331959

Other articles and tools will be shared both in Canvas and in class; please check Canvas weekly for required reading and multimedia materials.

Classroom Format

This class includes lecture, discussions, in-class activities, and independent research. Crisis communication is a topic that is best-learned with a hands on approach, and as such we will be doing a lot of in class activities that will be counted towards your grade. In addition to individual assignments and projects, there will also be group projects and collaborative efforts. We will have a lot of in-class discussions, and you will be expected to participate and add to the conversation.

Additionally, in order to get an understanding of crisis communications in practice, we will be discussing several current events and active case studies. Keeping up with news, pertinent economic and business cases, and relevant entertainment news will be needed for in-class discussions. Plan on spending 30 minutes to an hour each week gathering information to bring to class to share with classmates and put in the perspective of crisis communication.

This class can be a lot of fun, and my hope is to keep this class more informal and full of hands-on activities and discussion. However, that will depend on active participation and effort from you. If students become disengaged with in class activities and discussions, I will have to swap to more traditional written assignments.

Please keep in mind that all course discussions should remain respectful and professional. I expect you to show respect to all ideas and viewpoints, and be able to express alternative opinions or viewpoints in a tactful manner. Crisis communication planning can involve a lot of brainstorming, research, collaborative action, problem solving, and compromise. Sometimes this will be a stressful task, however, you are meant to work together with and not against your classmates.

Remember: Remain calm, patient, and good natured.

Meeman Lab Availability: Open labs 9:30-4:30 Monday-Friday. In addition to Meeman, labs are available in the Tech Hub and the Library.

For students that may not have access to a computer, the McWherter Library has laptops on loan. Please visit the Checkout desk in the library or visit:

<https://www.memphis.edu/libraries/technology/laptop.php>

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis Canvas home page: <https://memphis.instructure.com/>
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 to enter the course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

Students with disabilities & accommodations

If you will need accommodations through [Disability Resources](#) to meet any of the requirements of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. I'm happy to work with you to make sure you are able to be successful in this course. Remember, this is not a reflection on your ability nor is it giving special treatment, but rather making sure you are equipped to do your best in this course.

If at any point in the semester you are struggling with the course load or a specific assignment, please reach out to me for a meeting so we can work to get you back on track. I'm happy to help in any way I'm able, but you must be an advocate for yourself. It's impossible for me to help if I don't know there's a problem.

Trauma & Emotional Needs

I understand that outside of this course, you have many things going on that could add stress or take away attention from your school work. This course should be taken seriously, but I am happy to work with you to make sure that you stay healthy, well, and in the right mindset to do your best work. I've been a student also, and understand the challenges of balancing academics with work, family, and life. Please let me know if completing a requirement for the course is challenging or if something comes up throughout the semester that is hindering your success with this course. I care about what is going on with you and I'm happy to help where I can. My door (and Zoom room) is always open to you.

I also recommend taking advantage of the free counseling services offered by the University of Memphis. Please see below for links that could be helpful for you.

Campus and Community Resources: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/>

Resources specific to physical health and wellness:

[Mental health Services](#)

[UofM Student Health Center](#)

[Sexual, domestic, and intimate partner violence resources](#)

If you are affected financially because of COVID-19:

There are many resources available through the Dean of Students including:

[Dr. Rosie Phillips Bingham Student Emergency Fund](#)

[Emergency Food Resources](#), which includes [Tiger Pantry](#)

Academic Services:

[Writing Center](#)

[Tutoring](#)

Communities & Inclusion:

[Multicultural Affairs](#)

[LGBTQ+](#)

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.

A+ = 967 – 1,000 points, **A** = 934 – 966, **A-** = 900 – 933 points

B+ = 867 – 899 points, **B** = 834 – 866 points, **B-** = 800 – 833 points

C+ = 767 – 799 points, **C** = 734 – 766 points, **C-** = 700 – 733 points

D = 667 – 600 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 requirements

Assignments

Drills/Weekly Activities (Individual)	200 points
Discussions	150 points
Quizzes	150 points
Case Studies	100 points
Group Project: Crisis Plan & Simulation	200 points
In Class Activities	200 points
Total: 1,000 points	

Assignment Breakdown

More in-depth guidelines posted to Canvas.

Drills/Weekly Assignments: Weekly assignments will vary in nature as well as points and be used to build on the concepts we are learning each week in class, as well as gauge your progress in the course. You will complete a total of seven weekly assignments. Some examples of weekly assignments include creating an infographic with tips for crisis communication, crafting your own CCP, listening to expert/industry podcasts and providing reflection, environmental scanning assignment, etc.

Discussions: Your discussion grade will be composed of two items: 1, Your weekly participation in class discussions (worth 100 points) 2, Guiding the class discussion on an assigned day based on an overall current events crisis topic with prepared points of discussion and resources for classmates.

Quizzes: A total of three quizzes will be given throughout the semester to test your understanding of course concepts. Quizzes will be given on Canvas with a time limit of 45 minutes. You will have two attempts for each quiz with the highest grade taken. You are welcome to use your notes or book to help assist you on the quiz, but working with another student is prohibited.

Case Studies: Students will create a total of two real-world crisis communication case studies. Brand and topic must be cleared with instructor prior to the due date. Case studies should be completed in a slides/presentation or podcast format and provide the following information:

- Brand background and information: Organization size, publics, industry, overall reputation, mission statement/pertinent brand information
- Explanation of crisis community problem/opportunity: What has happened, or what could happen? Where did this problem start? What opportunities does the organization have? Who is affected? If this crisis cycle has already been completed, what were the outcomes?
- Recommendations for and discussion of crisis handling, communication, and overall response. What was done well? What needs to be improved? What have you learned for future situations?
- More details to come on Canvas.

In Class Assignments: In class activities will be completed to build on course concepts through experiential learning. Students must be present in class to complete the in class assignment unless a special circumstance has been cleared with the instructor *prior* to class.

Group Crisis Plan & Simulation: Students will be split into assigned groups and create a comprehensive CCP. Students will be expected to forecast potential issues, create crisis responses and communication tactics, assign speakers, conduct research about the industry, and be prepared for a crisis simulation. This assignment will be worked on throughout the semester and include multiple components. More details to come on Canvas.

Honors Component

If you are taking this class as an honors class, you will need to fulfill the honors project requirement. For the honors project requirement, you will expand on the final project requirement for this class with additional requirements. To discuss the honors requirements, please set up a Zoom meeting with me.

COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a basic weekly schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the semester. Although every effort will be made to stick with this schedule, please understand that changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced as soon as possible. All assignments are due on Sunday at 11:59 p.m. C.T. unless otherwise noted.

Week 1, August 22-28: Refresher on Crisis Communications

Readings: None

Assignments: Complete Introduction Survey (WA1)

Week 2, August 29-September 4: Crisis Management Knowledge

Readings: Chapter One in Ongoing Crisis Communication; Crisis Management Article Posted to Canvas

Assignments: In Class Activity

Crisis Communications Understanding Assignment (WA2)

Week 3, September 5-11: Crisis Management Foundations

No Class on Monday: Labor Day

Readings: Articles Posted to Canvas

Assignments: Podcast Reflection Assignment (WA3)

Group Breakouts

Week 4, September 12-18: Risk

Readings: Chapter Two in Ongoing Crisis Communications, Articles Posted to Canvas

Assignments: Social Media Environmental Scanning Assignment (WA4)

In Class Activity

Week 5, September 19-25: Crisis Preparing (Teams)

Readings: Chapter Four in Ongoing Crisis Communication

Assignments:

In Class Activity

Case Study Assignment 1

Week 6, September 26-October 2: Crisis Preparing (CCP)

Readings: Chapter Five in Ongoing Crisis Communication, Articles Posted to Canvas

Assignments:

In Class Activity

Individual CCP Assignment (WA5)

Week 7, October 3-7: Crisis Preparing: Putting it all Together

Readings: Articles Posted to Canvas

Assignments:

Quiz 1

Group Breakouts

Discussion Leaders 1 & 2

Note: Assignments due Friday night due to Fall Break.

Week 8, October 10-16:

Fall Break- October 8-11

Readings: None (Reflection on CCP Plans & Teams, Q&A's on group projects, Discussion)

Assignments: In Class Activity

Week 9, October 17-23: Crisis Mitigation

Readings: Chapter Three in Ongoing Crisis Communication; Articles on Canvas

Assignments:

Infographic or Podcast on Crisis Management (WA6)

Discussion Leader 3

Breakout Group Time

Week 10, October 24-30: Recognizing Crises

Readings: Chapter Six in Ongoing Crisis Communication

Assignments:

Discussion Leaders 4 & 5

Group Project Elements Due: Research & Potential Crises, CCP Plan

Week 11, October 31-November 6: Crisis Responding

Readings: Chapter Seven in Ongoing Crisis Communication

Assignments:

Discussion Leaders 6 & 7

Case Study 2 Due

Quiz 2

Week 12, November 7-13: Simulation Week

Assignments:

Discussion Leaders 8 & 9

Final Group Project Due

Week 13, November 14-20:

Readings: Chapter Eight in Ongoing Crisis Communication

Assignments:

- Presentation of Final Group Plan & Reflection
- Discussion Leaders 10 & 11

Week 14, November 21-27:

No Class Wednesday - Thanksgiving Break

Assignments:

- Discussion Leaders 10, 11

Week 15, November 28-December 4:

Assignments: Reflection Paper (WA7)

- Discussion Leaders 12, 13

Final: Quiz 3, Due Prior to Final Date

Syllabus Changes

The instructor reserves the right to make changes as necessary to this syllabus. If changes are necessitated during the term of the course, the instructor will immediately notify students of such changes by posting both notification and nature of change(s) on the course bulletin board.

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in PBRL 4421

- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

How professional values and competencies will be met

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

- Understand the variety of relationships between media and their audiences, including diverse audiences.
- Be sensitive to the needs of diverse and under-represented groups in programming and creating messages.
- Understand how new technology affects the media and communication.
- Understand what's involved in preparing for and communicating during a crisis.
- Identify a variety of crisis communication strategies and their effectiveness.

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

- Earn a passing score on periodic tests and/or exams.
- Dissect crisis communication stories and examples in the news for effectiveness in messaging, diversity, and reducing uncertainty.
- Prepare and present a crisis communication strategy and messaging for an organization.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Grow awareness of the variety of crisis communication strategies.
- Recognize strategies and missteps in public crisis communication cases.
- Aware of need for diversity in crisis communication.

Understanding

- When example crisis communication cases/events are presented, students will be asked to not only identify crisis strategies utilized, but also to discuss whether or not they were effective.
- Discussion questions will be posed in class to stimulate critical thinking. Independent thinking is encouraged.

Application

- The final project will be a mock press conference, asking students to represent one organization in a fictional crisis scenario, to craft and present messages for that organization, and to participate in the press conference as both a presenter and as a journalist asking questions.
- Review current events for crisis situations and be prepared to discuss their effectiveness relevant to course concepts.
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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 require 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

If a student tests positive for COVID-19, they need to notify the Dean of Students Office at deanofstudents@memphis.edu and notify the University of their result. Faculty are expected to be accommodating with extra time for assignments; however, decisions will vary on a case-by-case basis according to the severity of the student's illness. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, students are encouraged to wear masks indoors, wash hands frequently and wipe down their workstations with sanitizing wipes before and after class.