



**Communication 339 Crisis Communication**  
**Monday, 5:30 p.m. - 8 p.m.**

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No Office or Hours: Please feel free to contact me

Required Text:

- Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach by Kathleen Fearn-Banks  
Fourth Edition, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New York  
ISBN 978-0-415-88059-6  
Additional readings as assigned.

### **Course Description**

In our personal and professional lives, we do our best to plan ahead and prevent interpersonal or organizational conflict from turning into a public crisis. This course examines how communication is the foundation to crisis management and prevention. In this course students will learn how to use communication to help prevent conflict from turning into a crisis, how to strategically plan ahead for an potential crisis, as well as strategies for dealing with a crisis after it has become public. In order to understand how crisis communication functions, we will examine a number of case studies about individuals, companies, and governments. Some of these case studies illustrate a successful response to a crisis, others highlight how strategic planning helped turn a potential crisis into a non-issue, other case studies highlight instances where communication practices failed to adequately respond to the crisis on hand. Focused on analyzing and creating strategic crisis communication plans and practices, this course helps students build analytical and risk assessment skills for dealing with crisis in their personal and professional lives. Assignments will include personal reaction and analysis papers, as well as a group assignment on how to publicly respond to a crisis in verbal and written formats. Each class session is designed to be participatory with an emphasis on discussion, as well as individual and group assignments. In addition to relying on our textbook, we will draw from historical and contemporary crises.

### **Course Objectives**

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the various theories on crisis communication management.
2. Develop and execute a strategic communication plan for crisis management and press conference.
3. Compose effective communication messages through AP Style, flawless grammar, clear writing and public speaking.

4. Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical principles surrounding the field of Public Relations and public culture.

### **Division of Communication Learning Objectives for Communication Majors**

This course will help you achieve the Division’s objectives for all majors.

1. Communicate effectively using appropriate technologies for diverse audiences. (e.g., News Conference)
2. Plan, evaluate and conduct basic communication research. (e.g., Film Analysis Paper, Image Restoration Letter, and News Conference).
3. Use communication theories to understand and solve communication problems. (e.g., Image Restoration Letter or Research Paper)
4. Apply historical communication perspectives to contemporary issues and practices.
5. Apply principles of ethical decision making in communication contexts. (e.g., Image Restoration Letter)

### **Course Requirements**

Assignments	Points
Reaction Papers (Four X 50 points each)	200
Crisis Case Study Presentation	100
Mid-Term Project	100
Crisis Communication Plan	200
Final Exam	200
Class Participation	50
Image Repair Letter	50
Group News Conference	100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,000</b>

Extra Credit: Extra credit may be announced in class only. These opportunities are optional. Specific directions will be provided when the opportunity arises.

### **Crisis Case Study Presentation**

At one point in the semester you will be asked to find and present a contemporary crisis case study from the news. To complete this assignment you must:

1. Research a recent crisis case study (i.e., has happened in the past month)
2. Craft a 2-5 minute presentation on your case study. In this presentation you should align this crisis with specific course concepts (i.e., explain what was done well/poorly in this crisis according to our course readings/lectures).
3. Lead a 5-10 minute discussion on the crisis with the class.

### **Classroom Professionalism**

Anyone who misses a class should make arrangements with another student to copy notes, review announcements, and so forth. The instructor will present course materials only during designated class periods and will not reiterate materials from an entire class session during office hours. If students have specific questions that seek clarification about course content from

a previous class period, they should not hesitate to ask, and the instructor will gladly work to clarify the course materials. However, students should not arrive at an instructor's office hours with the assumption that the instructor will "go over whatever I missed."Continually arriving late and/or leaving early is strongly discouraged. If it becomes a distraction, the instructor will reach out directly to the student via email or face-to-face.

**Fifty (50) points** are earned through classroom participation. Please note that simply attending class does not constitute as participation. Students are expected to be active in class (i.e., engaged in discussion/activities and making substantive connections to the course material/textbook).

### **Exam**

There will be one open-book exam at the end of the semester. This exam is to demonstrate your understanding of key concepts from the readings, lecture, and class discussions.

### **Image Repair Letter**

This assignment allows you to put your crisis communication skills to practice by writing a **2 – 3 page public letter** to a person or organization that has experienced a crisis. Your role in this assignment is to write a letter as a PR Professional/Student. Your goal is to outline the rhetorical exigency and ongoing crisis that your subject faces/has faced. In your letter, you should provide two concrete recommendations on how your subject can repair their image in the wake of this crisis. Your recommendations should be based on the image repair strategies discussed in this class. Even though this is a letter, you must conduct your own research for this assignment, as well as apply certain key ideas discussed in class.

To complete this assignment, you should think about the following:

1. What current event or crisis interests you? Find a crisis that was not handled well by an individual or organization.
2. Think through what practical advice you could give this individual or organization based on the best practices from our textbook or lectures in class.
3. Research how your chosen person, business or institution is responded to the selected crisis.
4. Research and analyze the effectiveness of their communication strategies—pointing to effective and ineffective examples.
5. Tie your analysis of the crisis to key course readings and ideas.
6. Finally, after analyzing why the subject of your paper failed to have an adequate crisis communication response, make two concrete recommendations on how they could improve their communication skills and restore their image. In other words, give two concrete recommendations for how they use actions or words to repair their image.
7. Tie your recommendations to key concepts from the class. You should cite the textbook or supplemental readings. The idea is to put theory into practice. Explain key course concepts to the person you are writing. In short, teach them some of the crisis communication best practices we've been examining throughout the semester.
8. Please note that papers will be graded on the quality of their analysis, argument, the ability to follow the paper guidelines, and spelling/grammar.

## **Group Crisis Communication News Conference and Backgrounder**

*Consists of four parts*

For this project, you will work in teams of 4 - 5 to produce the strategy and content for an entire crisis news conference and Q&A session. After selecting your team members, create a crisis that would require an initial response and image restoration strategies. Your crisis can be anything from the book, a current event, etc.

**Part one** of the group assignment requires that you work with your team members to create a backgrounder for members of the media and public (i.e., your classmates). A backgrounder is a long-form press release. In this document, your group should define the crisis and give all the necessary background information.

For **part two**, the oral segment of the group project, you will execute a news conference that includes a Q&A session. The primary goal of this assignment is to develop your strategic communication skills in both written and spoken form. The assignment will be evaluated on the content, as well as the group's ability to maintain a clear message and strategy throughout the entire press conference.

Although individual group members may take responsibility for certain parts of the press conference, the entire group should develop the strategy, speaking roles, and key messages. The idea behind this group project is to begin working as a team at the beginning of the semester and develop the project over the course of several weeks.

Development of the Press Conference will include several items, specifically:

1. An introductory statement that defines the crisis and events leading up to its occurrence.
2. A timeline of events from the moment the event turned into a public crisis.
3. A statement from an authority figure who was a first responder and/or is directly involved with resolving the crisis at hand.
4. A statement on next steps for resolving this crisis and when the next communication will occur.
5. A designated spokesperson who provides answers from the news media and public.

In addition to creating content for your group's press conference, **part three** of this assignment requires that you act as a reporter or member of the public during each of the other groups' press conferences. You will be charged with the duty of asking a question about the crisis at hand.

**Part four** is a short peer review. The idea is to work as a team and hold everyone accountable.

## Reaction Papers

Students will complete four reaction papers during the semester. These will be three pages minimum each on topics which will be distributed on a separate form.

## Mid-Term Project

For this project, students will select a crisis scenario from any source (book/news/current event) and write a reaction paper. Specific information will be presented.

## Crisis Communication Plan

For this project, students will develop a written crisis communication plan. Specific information will be presented during an upcoming class.

## GENERAL GRADING POLICIES

### Submission of Assignments

All assignments should be submitted to the instructor by the specified date. He likes the use of paper!

### Grading Policy

All course work is due by the date and time listed in the schedule unless otherwise noted. Requests to extend a due date for an assignment will be handled on a case-by-case basis and the instructor has final say about any such arrangement. Requests should be made before an assignment is due—except in extenuating circumstances. Late work automatically will be docked 10% for each 24 hours after an assignment is due.

Students are encouraged to discuss all grades with the instructor. Please discuss any issues as soon as possible after the assignment is due and the grade is recorded.

### Revision Policy

One of the key aspects to this course is to hone in your writing skills. As part of that focus, editing is always the most important part of the writing process. **Those who earn less than an 80 percent on a written assignment** will be permitted to revise the assignment in order to improve the grade, according to the following policy:

1. **No revisions will be allowed for assignments earning an 80 percent or higher.**
2. A revision does NOT guarantee a higher grade. You must show significant improvement to earn a higher grade.
3. A revision can improve the grade by up to 10 percentage points.
4. No revisions will be permitted for group projects or the final plan.
5. Revisions will be due one week after you receive feedback.
6. Late work cannot be revised.

### **Final Grade Scale**

<b>Total Points</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>
1000-925	A
924-895	A-
894-875	B+
874-825	B
824-795	B-
794-775	C+
774-725	C
724-695	C-
694-675	D+
674-625	D
624-595	D-
594-0	F

### **GENERAL COURSE POLICIES**

Read the following policies carefully. Enrollment in the class constitutes agreement with and understanding of these policies. Ignorance of these policies does not excuse their violation.

#### **Technology in the Classroom**

Laptops or tablets may be used to take notes and for collaborative in-class assignments. Cell phones should be silenced and not used in the classroom. If you are expecting a phone call or text message that is absolutely urgent, please let the instructor know ahead of time, and then quietly excuse yourself from the room to take care of the matter. Adherence of this technology policy is appreciated.

#### **Excuses for Missed Work**

Your instructor, on a case-by-case basis, will evaluate excuses for missed work. Permission to make up missed work will be granted only in the most unusual of circumstances, and only for excused absences. Any work missed due to an unexcused absence cannot be made up. These requirements are necessarily strict and enforced in order to provide fairness to all class participants.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**

From the UWSP 14.01 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES – Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors. Students who violate these standards must be confronted and must accept the consequences of their actions. For more info:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Academic-Misconduct.aspx>

### **Students with Special Needs/Disabilities**

If you have a disability and require accommodation, please register with the Disability and Assistive Technology Center (6th floor of the Learning Resource Center – that is, the Library) and contact me at the beginning of the course. More information is available here:

<http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>.

### **Emergency Procedures**

In the event of an emergency, this course complies with UWSP's outline for various situations. A full list of these emergency plans is available here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures/default.aspx>

### **A Note on Achieving Academic Success in this Course**

I cannot wait to work with each and every one of you throughout the semester. I want everyone in this course to achieve their academic goals. To reach this end, I am happy to be here for you as much as you'd like. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me via email or phone at any time.