

**CORPORATE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS**  
**Masters Program MPPR 810-01**  
**3 Credits**

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**Office Hours:** By appointment  
**Meeting:** Thursdays, 7:45-9:45 p.m. – January 14 to April 29, 2010  
**Google Group:** Corporate Crisis Communications – Spring 2010

**Course Description:**

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 (H1N1, 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 presentations and participative exercises will be used. The following guide will help provide focus for individual assessment and class discussion.

**CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS CRISIS QUESTION 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 analysis, strategies and plan execution.
2. What are the CAUSES of business crises?
3. What PRE-CRISIS 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?

**Class Learning Outcomes:**

**This course is intended to provide an understanding of the framework and tools** necessary to develop the expertise and confidence to successfully handle communications 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, senior corporate communications and business professionals will be invited into the class to present crisis case histories and to engage with class members in discussing communications strategies. Lessons directly relevant to modern corporate communications will be taught through class interaction, role-playing, and a series of individual and group assignments—both writing and stand-up presentation exercises.

**Required Texts, Reading Assignments and Research:**

Three textbooks will be required reading for the course: ***Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach***, by Kathleen Fearn-Banks, 3rd edition, published by Routledge 2009; ***Damage Control: How to Get the Upper Hand When Your Business is Under Attack*** by Eric Dezenhall and John Weber, Penguin Group, New York, paperback, 2008; and ***Digital Strategies for Powerful Corporate Communications*** by Paul A. Argenti and Courtney M. Barnes, McGraw-Hill, Hardcover, 2009.

- All three texts are available at [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com). You also will be asked to access, read and discuss a number of Harvard Business Review and other articles that will be available on our class' *Google Group* 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*, and the *Economist*.
- You will also be expected to use online research tools for your Pre-Crisis Intelligence Project (PIP), one of four assignments you will be assessed a grade.

**Expectations of Instructors:**

- You can expect honest answers and feedback to questions.
- You will receive assignment feedback in a timely manner.
- You can enter a question or comment on the class *Google Group* online site, email or call one of the instructors and receive a response within 48

hours (usually sooner, unless we are traveling); you can schedule in-person meetings at dates and times that work for both of our schedules.

- You will learn in an engaging environment, where your participation, attention and input are valued.
- Your success—greater understanding of corporate crises and better ability to qualify and perform as an effective crisis communicator working in a business or corporation—is the expectation and goal of your instructors.
- *We will try to be affirming stakeholders in your success.*

**Attendance:** Attendance and full participation are necessary for success in this class. **If you miss more than two classes, your final grade will drop a half letter grade.** Special circumstances should be discussed with us immediately to receive consideration. In the event you need to miss a class, please notify us by email before the start of the class. It is your responsibility to get the notes and announcements from one of the other members in the class and to monitor announcements/discussions on our Google Group.

### **Crisis Communications Class Assignments**

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

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 approved PIP category (a commercial industry or specific corporation); (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 or industry; 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 *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 speakers*), and will suggest how that historic crisis might have been affected by modern or current circumstances and technologies. To

satisfy this assignment for 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 study; 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 **25 points**.

3. **2 CRISES:** 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 **25 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 or industry that was examined in class (which could be the case study in your *BAO* paper); or (B) research findings and implications of a company or industry developed in your *PIP* paper. You will then prepare and deliver to the class and faculty a 10-minute slide (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 or industry) 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 **25 points**.

**The Grading Scale, based on 100 points, is as follows:**

A	94-100
A-	90-93.9
B+	88-89.9
B	84-87.9
B-	80-83.9
C	70-79.9
F	69.9 and below

**Submission/Presentation/Grading of Work:** Communications is a “deadline-driven” profession. You are expected to submit work on time and commit the time to making it the highest quality. Your grade will be determined from written assignments, participation in the pre-crisis intelligence project, participation in the mandatory group project, individual presentations and a final project.

**You must provide a hard copy of each assignment.** This copy should be given to the instructors *on or before the deadline*, and signed in by an instructor. You are also asked to provide an electronic version to the instructors on or before the deadline.

**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 not be graded.*

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.*

Written assignments ***will be graded*** based on the following criteria:

- *Professionalism* – concise, clearly stated, free of errors.
- *Quality 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 audience to take action
- *Executive Ready* – Your “assignment” is written in a business format for your CEO and other senior executives to review and approve

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.

**Commitment to ethical behavior:** As signatories to the Georgetown University Honor Pledge, and as good scholars and citizens, you are expected to uphold with the letter and spirit of the Standards of Conduct outlined in the Georgetown Honor System and on the Honor Council website. As faculty members, we are also committed to upholding the Honor System and report all suspected cases of academic dishonesty. For more information, please visit:  
<http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/index.html>

**Professional Standards and Values:** Please review and understand the Arthur Page Society Principles. (We are members of Arthur Page, and many of the guest speakers are our colleagues in this important leadership organization.) See the Page Principles at <http://www.awpagesociety.com/site/about/pageprinciples/>, the PRSA Member Statement of Professional Values and Ethics Pledge ([www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org)), and the IABC Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators (<http://www.iabc.com/about/code.htm>).

**Academic Resource Center:** If you believe you have a disability, please contact the Academic Resource Center ([arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu)) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

**Civility Statement:** Class discussions require active listening and participation by all of us. As in a corporate environment, this class will encourage diversity of opinion and require you to be respectful of opinions that might differ from yours. Please turn off all cell phones, iPods, computer games and other distractions during class.

**Georgetown University Honor Pledge:** In 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.

**References:**

- Harvard Business Review on Crisis Management, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2000
- Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable, by Steven Fink, iUniverse, Inc., Lincoln, NE, paperback, 2002 (Originally published by American Management Association, 1986)
- Damage Control: How to Get the Upper Hand When Your Business is Under Attack, by Eric Dezenhall and John Weber, Penguin Group, New York, paperback, 2008
- Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image, by Charles J. Fombrun, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 1996
- 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
- Crisis Communication: A Case Book Approach, by K. Fearn-Banks, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Routledge, 2009
- Crisis in Organizations: Managing and Communicating in the Heat of Chaos, by Laurence Barton, SouthWestern Publishing Company, 2001
- Strategic Reputation Risk Management, by Judy Larkin, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003
- The Essential Guide to Managing Corporate Crises: A Step-by-Step Handbook for Surviving Major Catastrophes, by Ian Mitroff, Oxford University Press, 1996
- 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
- Risk Issues and Crisis Management, by Michael Regester and Judy Larkin, Kogan Page, 1997
- 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
- When It Hits The Fan: Managing the Nine Crises of Business, by Gerald C. Meyers with John Holusha, New American Library, 1986
- Digital Strategies for Powerful Corporate Communications by Paul A. Argenti and Courtney M. Barnes, McGraw-Hill, Hardcover, 2009.

*Composed by faculty, Crisis Communications: E. Bruce Harrison and Judith Muhlberg  
September 2009*

**Corporate Crisis Communications  
Course Outline and Assignments  
Thursdays: 7:45 – 9:45 p.m.  
January 14 – April 29, 2010**

This course will be designed around the framework, tools and best practices to communicate during a corporate crisis. You will be able to engage with corporate chief communication officers (CCOs) as guest lecturers. We will also apply readings, case studies and discussions on strategy and leadership to further your knowledge of corporate crisis communications and enable you to think as a CCO.

Class	Discussion	Reading/Assignments
January 14	<p><b>Course Overview</b> Overview of course, introductions, expectations; graded assignments (PIPs, BAO, 2 Crises and Final), group project mandatory attendance date, schedule for presentation of final assignments; and Google Group.</p> <p><b>Introduction to Corporate Crisis Communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a “crisis” –and what are the leading types and causes of corporate crises?</li> <li>• How do “crises” begin – and how can you track pre-crisis symptoms?</li> <li>• What are the basic crisis management strategies?</li> <li>• What is the corporate crisis communication role?</li> </ul> <p>CLASS EXERCISE: Crisis Definition</p>	<p><u>Confirm:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final Presentation date</li> <li>• Confirm Group Project date</li> <li>• Google Group site</li> <li>• Pre-crisis Intelligence Project (PIP)</li> </ul> <p><u>Readings:</u> Chapter 1: <b>Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach</b></p> <p><i>“How to Talk Your Way Through a Downturn”, FT 1/29/2009, by Paul Argenti.</i></p> <p><u>Handouts:</u> Types of crises, causes, symptoms; <i>Tips and Techniques: Crisis Planning and Management</i></p>
January 21	<p><b>Localizing a Crisis: MTBE in Milwaukee</b> Guest Speaker: Art Wiese, VP- Corporate Communications, Entergy Corporation</p> <p><b>Pre-Crisis Phase: Best Practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis Management Plan</li> <li>• Crisis Management Team</li> <li>• Spokesperson</li> <li>• Practice Exercise</li> <li>• Pre-drafted Messages</li> </ul> <p>CLASS EXERCISE: Crisis Definition</p>	<p><u>Readings:</u> Chapter 2: Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach</p> <p><u>Handout:</u> Crisis Communications “Cheat Sheet”</p>

January 28	<p><b>Product Recalls: Dangers in the Food Industry – the Anatomy of a Recall and Its Implications</b></p> <p>Guest Speaker: Marguerite Copel, VP-Corporate Communications, Dean Foods</p>	<p><u>Readings:</u> TBA</p>
February 4	<p><b>The Initial Crisis Response: Best Practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be quick! Have an initial response within the first hour</li> <li>• Be accurate – carefully check all facts.</li> <li>• Be consistent. Keep spokesperson informed and provide key message points.</li> <li>• Make public safety the #1 priority (if appropriate)</li> <li>• Use all available channels.</li> <li>• Provide expression of concern/sympathy for victims. (if appropriate)</li> </ul>	<p><u>Readings:</u> Chapter TBA: Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach</p> <p>(HANDOUTS) Chapters 18 and 19, ('Lessons of the Exxon Valdez' and 'Do's and Don'ts of Crisis Communications') "Going Green," E. Bruce Harrison</p> <p>"Crisis Communications: Lessons from 9/11," Harvard Business Review, Dec. 2002, by Paul Argenti.</p>
February 11	<p><b>The Workplace Violence Crisis</b></p> <p>Guest Speaker: Greg Elliott, Senior Vice President – Corporate Human Resources and Administration, Navistar International</p> <p>PIP#1 Due</p>	<p><u>Readings:</u> TBA</p>
February 18	<p><b>Pre-Crisis Intelligence Project: Update Two Crises: Class Exercise</b></p> <p><b>Communications Strategies: Examining Options to Minimize Risk and Regain Advantage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let Legal lead?</li> <li>• Put CEO/senior executives out front?</li> <li>• Admit accountability/apologize?</li> <li>• Deny guilt/go on offensive?</li> <li>• Engage and activate allies/stakeholders?</li> <li>• Aggressive advertising?</li> <li>• Personalized engagement/social media/blogs?</li> <li>• Elevate financial/social/brand</li> </ul>	<p><u>Readings:</u> "Damage Control: How to Get the Upper Hand When Your Business is Under Attack," by Eric Dezenhall and John Weber, Penguin Group, 2008</p>

	values, history and record?	
February 25	<b>Projecting the Worst-case Outcome (WCO) and the Best Achievable Outcome (BAO) and understanding the Climax</b>	<i>Readings: "Damage Control: How to Get the Upper Hand When Your Business is Under Attack," Dezenhall and Weber.</i>
March 4	<b>Averting a Crisis: Landing on the Hudson</b> Guest Speaker: Representative from US Airways  <b>PIP#2 Due</b>	<i>Readings: TBA</i>
March 18	<b>Catastrophic and Litigation Communications: Katrina and the Aftermath</b> Guest Speaker: Michael Fernandez, Vice President – Public Affairs, State Farm Insurance  <b>BAO Due</b>	<i>Readings: Pre- and Post-Katrina readings posted on Google Group</i>
March 25	<b>Role Playing: "In the Hot Seat" as Your Team Responds to a Crisis Scenario</b>  <b>2 CRISES Due</b>	Group Project: Attendance Mandatory – No preparation necessary
April 8	<b>The Financial Crisis: An Insider's View from AIG</b>  Guest Speaker: Nick Ashooh, Senior Vice President – Communications, American International Group <b>Pre-Crisis Intelligence Project: Update</b>	<i>Readings (HANDOUT) "The Beautiful Machine," by Robert O'Harrow, Jr. and Brady Dennis, Washington Post 12/29/08</i> ⋮
April 15	<b>Post-Crisis Phase: Reputation Impacts and New Commitments</b>  <b>Review of LESSONS LEARNED</b> <b>PIP#3 Due</b>	<i>Readings: (HANDOUT) Chapter 15 ('Song of Solomon – Wall Street crisis of 1991'), "Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image," by Charles Fombrun</i>
April 22	<b>Final Presentations</b> – 10 minutes each. Paper to be provided to Bruce Harrison and Judith Muhlberg; PPT prepared for class presentation	
April 29	<b>Final Presentations</b> – 10 minutes each. Paper to be provided to Bruce Harrison and Judith Muhlberg; PPT prepared for class presentation	

\*Please note that corporate guest speakers will be tapped when they are planning a Washington, D.C. trip for other business, so there could be some shifting of class presentations.

We are looking forward to having you in class! Judith and Bruce