

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richard T. Robertson School of Media & Culture
Syllabus and Class Schedule for Fall 2015
MASC435 Crisis Communication

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Class Hours: Wednesdays 11:00 am – 1:40 pm
Classroom: Temple 2223

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-3:30 p.m. (or by appointment)

Prerequisite: MASC 210 Public Relations, completed with a grade of C or better.

Course Description

MASC435 explores theories and research related to communication before, during, and after a crisis. Students examine the fundamentals of organizational communication, crisis management, and strategic and crisis communication planning and examine case studies of a number of real-life crises: organizational crises, natural disasters, accidents, terrorism incidents, health crises, and major crises of credibility. The goal is to prepare students to better strategize, plan, execute, and evaluate crisis communication across a variety of types of organizations and crises. Additionally, students should become better analysts of crisis communication in the world around them.

Required Text

Crisis Communications – Theory and Practice by Alan Jay Zaremba

Additional Readings

Throughout the semester, additional readings will be posted on Blackboard, emailed, and handed out in class. Students are responsible for checking their email and Blackboard on a regular basis. Students are also expected to stay up to date on current events. Quizzes, class discussions, and participation exercises will be rooted in current crisis situations that unfold throughout the semester. Students who walk into the classroom unaware of major events happening in the world (and news) around them will not be successful in this class.

In addition, there are a variety of crisis books that specialize in a particular area, including disaster sociology, complexity theory, organizational response, public health, terrorism, and rhetorical analysis. If you have a particular area of interest, consider asking Dr. B for a recommendation on a book within that area.

Grading

The evaluation of your performance in this course will be based on the following:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>	
Quiz 1	50	
Quiz 2	50	
Quiz 3	50	
Quiz 4	50	
Crisis Type Bootcamp	100	
Crisis Case Study Presentation	150	
Final Simulation Response Report	200	(100 for team and 100 for individual)
Final Press Conference	100	(50 for team and 50 for individual)
Final Debriefing Memo & Reflection	100	(50 for team and 50 for individual)
Participation	150	
Total	1000	

Your **final grade** in the course will be calculated as follows:

- A = 900 to 1000 points
- B = 800 to 899 points
- C = 700 to 799 points
- D = 600 to 699 points
- F = 599 points or below

Grading Criteria

The following characteristics will be assessed in grading written work:

- Accuracy of content
- Evidence of strategic, in-depth thinking and analysis
- Mechanics (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation)
- Organization of ideas and writing quality (e.g., flow, paragraph format, thesis sentences)

Quality of Work

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar, and language. A large part of public relations is having a polished written concept of what you are communicating. This includes all class work and presentations. Problems in these or other areas will result in the deduction of points.

I expect your work to be good and to be yours. What is not yours should be fully cited. In documenting sources you should use APA formatting. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources. In addition, Purdue University's Online Writing Lab is an excellent resource, and can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR MASC435

****Note: The calendar is subject to change****

Date	Topics	Readings/Homework Due
Aug. 26	Introductions; Syllabus and Course Overview Discussions, Terms, Misunderstandings	
Sept. 2	Foundations for Crisis Communication	Chapter 1
Sept. 9	Crisis Types	Chapter 2 Crisis Type Bootcamp
Sept. 16	Quiz #1 on Ch. 1-2 <i>Spot the Crisis Game</i>	
Sept. 23	**UCI WORLD BIKE RACE** NO CLASS!	
Sept. 30	Theories and Concepts of Crisis Communication	Chapter 3 Crisis Case Studies
Oct. 7	Publics and Crisis Communication	Chapter 3; Assigned Readings Crisis Case Studies
Oct. 14	Quiz #2 on Ch. 3 <i>Spin the Crisis Wheel Game</i>	Crisis Case Studies
Oct. 21	Planning for Crises	Chapter 4 Crisis Case Studies
Oct. 28	Crisis Messaging & Media Overview	Assigned Readings Crisis Case Studies
Nov. 4	Responding to Crises	Chapter 5 Crisis Case Studies
Nov. 11	Quiz #3 on Ch. 5 <i>Ethics Scenarios</i>	Chapter 6 Crisis Case Studies
Nov. 18	Crisis Teams & Media Relations Recovery & Resilience	Chapters 7-8 Crisis Case Studies
Nov. 25	<u>Class canceled</u> <u>Happy Thanksgiving!</u>	Assigned Readings Crisis Case Studies
Dec. 2	Quiz #4 on Ch. 6-7 Where do we go from here?	Assigned Readings Crisis Case Studies
TBA	Final Simulation & Press Conferences	Final Response Report Due Final Debriefing Memo & Reflection Due Media Questions Due Peer Evaluation Due

University Policies

VCU Email Policy

Email is considered an official method for communication at VCU because it delivers information in a convenient, timely, cost-effective, and environmentally aware manner. Students are expected to check their official VCU email on a frequent and consistent basis in order to remain informed of university-related communications. The university recommends checking email daily. Students are responsible for the consequences of not reading, in a timely fashion, university-related communications sent to their official VCU student email account. This policy ensures that all students have access to this important form of communication. It ensures students can be reached through a standardized channel by faculty and other staff of the university as needed. Mail sent to the VCU email address may include notification of university-related actions, including disciplinary action. Please read the policy in its entirety: <http://www.ts.vcu.edu/kb/3407.html>.

VCU Honor System: Upholding Academic Integrity

The VCU Honor System policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty and administration in upholding academic integrity, while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals to the due process offered by administrative hearings and appeals. According to this policy, "Members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity." In addition, "All members of the VCU community are presumed to have an understanding of the VCU Honor System and are required to:

- Agree to be bound by the Honor System policy and its procedures;
- Report suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
- Support an environment that reflects a commitment to academic integrity;
- Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System cases;
- Maintain confidentiality regarding specific information in Honor System cases."

More information can be found at in the VCU policy library at <http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Honor%20System.pdf>.

Student Conduct in the Classroom

According to the Faculty Guide to Student Conduct in Instructional Settings (<http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf>), "The university is a community of learners. Students, as well as faculty, have a responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment that supports effective instruction. In order for faculty members (including graduate teaching assistants) to provide and students to receive effective instruction in classrooms, laboratories, studios, online courses, and other learning areas, the university expects students to conduct themselves in an orderly and cooperative manner." Among other things, cell phones and beepers should be turned off while in the classroom. The Student Code of Conduct also prohibits the possession of or carrying of any weapon. For more information see <http://register.dls.virginia.gov/details.aspx?id=3436>.

Students with Disabilities

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, require that VCU provide "academic adjustments" or "reasonable accommodations" to any student who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. To receive accommodations, students must request them by contacting the Disability Support Services Office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or the Division for Academic Success on the MCV campus (828-9782). Please also visit the Disability Support Services website at www.students.vcu.edu/dss and/or the Division for Academic Success website at healthsciences.vcu.edu/DAS/ for additional information.

Any student who has a disability that requires an accommodation should schedule a meeting with the instructor at the student's earliest convenience. Additionally, if coursework requires the student to work in a lab environment, the student should advise the instructor or a department chairperson of any concerns that the student may have regarding safety issues related to a disability. Students should follow this procedure for all courses in the academic semester.

Statement on Military Short-Term Training or Deployment

If military students receive orders for short-term training or for deployment/mobilization, they should inform and present their orders to Military Student Services and to their professor(s). For further information on policies and procedures contact Military Services at 828-5993 or access the corresponding policies.

Excused Absences for Students Representing the University

Students who represent the university (athletes and others) do not choose their schedules. Student athletes are required to attend games and/or meets. All student athletes should provide their schedules to their instructors at the beginning of the semester. The Intercollegiate Athletic Council strongly encourages faculty to treat missed classes or exams (because of a scheduling conflict) as excused absences and urges faculty to work with the students to make up the work or exam.

Campus Emergency Information

What to Know and Do to Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU:

- Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts. Keep your information up-to-date. Within the classroom, the professor will keep his or her phone on to receive any emergency transmissions.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities. Within the classroom, follow your professor's instructions.
- Know where to go for additional emergency information.
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234).
- Report suspicious activities and objects.
- Keep your permanent address and emergency contact information current in eServices.

Important Dates

You can view important dates for the Fall 2015 semester in the university calendar (http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/ac_fullViewAll.asp?term=Fall+2015).

VCU Mobile

The VCU Mobile application is a valuable tool to get the latest VCU information on the go. The application contains helpful information including the VCU directory, events, course schedules, campus maps, athletics and general VCU news, emergency information, library resources, Blackboard and more. To download the application on your smart phone or for more information, please visit <http://m.vcu.edu>.

Class Registration Required for Attendance

Students may attend only those classes for which they have registered. Faculty may not add students to class rosters or Blackboard. Therefore, if students are attending a class for which they have not registered, they must stop attending.

Withdrawal from Classes

Before withdrawing from classes, students should consult their instructor as well as other appropriate university offices. Withdrawing from classes may negatively impact a student's financial aid award and his or her semester charges. To discuss financial aid and the student bill, visit the Student Services Center at 1015 Floyd Avenue (Harris Hall) and/or contact your financial aid counselor regarding the impact on your financial aid. Contact information for the University Financial Aid Office is available at <http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu/finaid/contact-us/>.

Student Financial Responsibility

Students assume the responsibility of full payment of tuition and fees generated from their registration and all charges for housing and dining services, and other applicable miscellaneous charges. Students are ultimately responsible for any unpaid balance on their account as a result of the University Financial Aid Office or their third party sponsor canceling or reducing their award(s).

**Content last updated July 2014*