CO449 Crisis Communication
3 Credits; Summer, 2013

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Class Time: Monday/Wednesday 6:15-9:15 p.m.
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Boston College Mission Statement

Strengthened by more than a century and a half of dedication to academic excellence, Boston College commits itself to the highest standards of teaching and research in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society through its own accomplishments, the work of its faculty and staff, and the achievements of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the nation’s finest universities and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary society the richness of the Catholic intellectual idea of a mutually illuminating relationship between religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.

Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive religious tradition. As a Catholic and Jesuit University, it is rooted in a world view that encounters God in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together. In this spirit, the University regards the contribution of different religious traditions and values systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life and to the continuous development of its distinctive intellectual heritage.

Course Description

This course is designed to examine events and situations that actually or potentially threaten the viability of an organization. Attention is devoted to developing an effective crisis communication plan, speaking simultaneously to multiple stakeholders, decision-making under pressure, and resolving—rather than litigating—organizational problems. This course relies heavily on the case study method. Among the case studies examined are the Tylenol product tampering incident, the Exxon Valdez accident, the 2010 British Petroleum Oil spill, the Union Carbide Bhopal gas leak, the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster, the Enron accounting scandal, the Texaco racial slurs crisis, school violence at Columbine High School, the recovery efforts during Hurricane Katrina, the 2011 earthquake in Japan, and the 2012 school shootings in Newton, CT.
This course fulfills the requirements for a writing-intensive seminar in the Department of Communication at Boston College.

**Course Objectives**

1. Students will develop an understanding of the role that a crisis plays in developing public policy.
2. Student will be able to identify natural-history theories, strategies-based theories, the key elements of focusing event theory, and miscellaneous theoretical approaches to crisis communication.
3. Students will apply theories and constructs to real-life case studies of crisis events that have occurred during the past thirty years.
4. Students will demonstrate an ethical knowledge and competency in the detection of persuasive messages by management to explain the causes and effects of a crisis situation.
5. Students will acquire competencies in using primary sources for research, synthesizing data, and in writing.

**Grading**

The approximate breakdown of points awarded during the course is as follows: Midterm Examination, forty percent; Research Paper, forty percent; Evidence Kit and Prospectus, ten percent; and Class Participation, ten percent. Excessive absences during the semester will be cause for automatically lowering the final grade.

**WCAS Grading System**

The undergraduate grading system consistent of twelve categories: A (4.00), A- (3.67), excellent; B+ (3.33, B (3.00) B- (2.67), good; C+ (2.33), C (2.00), C- (1.67), satisfactory; D+ (1/33). D (1.00), D- (.67) passing but unsatisfactory; F (.00), failure; I (.00), incomplete; F (.00) course dropped without notifying office; W (.00) official withdrawal from course. The graduate grading system is A (4.00), A- (3.67) excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), good; B- (2.67), C (2.00), passing but not for degree credit; F (0.00) failure.

Grade reports: All students are required to log into the web through Agora to access their semester grades. Students must utilize their BC username and password to log on. If your username or password is not known, the HELP Desk located in the Campus Technology Resource Center (CTRC) in O'Neill Library will issue a new one. The CTRC requires a valid picture ID (A BC ID, driver's license or passport) to obtain your password.
Readings

Each student should have a copy of the following two books: Donald Fishman, *Readings in Crisis Communication* (Chestnut Hill, BC Press, 2013); Diana Hacker, *A Writer’s Reference*, Seventh Edition (Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 2011). Please ask for the latest updated version of the Hacker book. Both of the assigned books for the course are available in paperback. The Fishman text is a coursepack that also contains information about the assignments in the course. For special questions on documentation issues, see also Diana Hacker's website: http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/ In addition, there may be a series of readings--as needed--placed on reserve at O’Neill Library. Readings should be completed on or before the dates listed, and students should be prepared to discuss intelligently the materials they have read.

Written Work

Each student will submit a twenty-page research paper analyzing some aspect of crisis communication. The paper may focus on a case study of a particular incident, or it may examine a major concept in crisis communication, such as the role of a CEO or a whistleblower. The research paper should reflect the following six criteria: (1) Use of APA in-text reference notes; (2) A minimum of twenty-five references in the text; (3) A minimum of one-fourth of the sources should be library or Internet sources; the other three-fourths will be the opposite of whatever decision you make about the original one-fourth; (4) A minimum of eleven different sources; and (5) Effective use of the writing criteria discussed in class and included in the coursepack. Reading assignments during the semester will provide examples of well-designed and thoughtful case studies, such as the Berg and Robb article on Tylenol. Other assigned readings will serve as a source of ideas for possible paper topics. A more detailed discussion of the research paper will occur during the class lectures on research that focus upon data collection, research design, and the actual writing of the paper. There are sample research papers in the coursepack.

Examinations

There will be one examination in this course: a Midterm Examination. The test will include objective questions, short-answer identification questions, and essay questions. A more precise description of the examination will be presented during the in-class prep session that will be held prior to the test. During the examination, it is expected that all students will adhere to the highest standards of behavior and integrity. Any misconduct during an examination will result in severe penalties.
Scholarship/Academic Integrity

It is expected that all students will produce original work and cite references appropriately. Failure to reference properly is plagiarism. Academic dishonesty includes but is not necessarily limited to cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. All such cases will be referred to the Dean of WCAS for disciplinary action. Cases of plagiarism will lead to an automatic failure in the course.

Disability Statement

Classroom accommodations will be provided for qualified students with documented disabilities. Students are invited to contact the Connors Family Learning Center office about accommodations for this course. Telephone appointments are available as needed. Appointments can be made by calling 617-552-8903. You may also make an appointment in person. For further information, you can locate the disability resources on the web at http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html.

Attendance

Class attendance is an important component of learning. Students are expected to attend all classes and to arrive by the beginning of and remain for the entire period. When an occasion occurs that prevents a student from attending class, it is the student’s obligation to inform the instructor of the conflict before the class meets. The student is still expected to meet all assignment deadlines. If a student knows that he or she will be absent on a particular day, the student is responsible for seeing the instructor beforehand to obtain the assignments for that day. If a student misses a class, he or she will be responsible for making up the work by obtaining a classmate’s notes and handouts and turning in any assignments due. Furthermore, many instructors give points for participation in class. If you miss class, you cannot make up participation points associated with that class. Types of absences that are not typically excused include weddings, showers, vacations, birthday parties, graduations, etc. Additional assignments, penalties, and corrective are at the discretion of the instructor. If circumstances necessitate excessive absence from class, students should consider withdrawing from class. In all cases, students are expected to accept the decision of the instructor regarding attendance policies specific to the class.

Consistent with our commitment of creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of different backgrounds, we believe that every reasonable effort should be made to allow members of the university community to observe their religious holidays without jeopardizing the fulfillment of their academic obligations. It is the responsibility of students to review course syllabi as soon as they are distributed.
and to consult faculty members promptly regarding any possible conflicts with observed religious holidays. If asked, the student should provide accurate information about the obligations entailed in the observance of that particular holiday. However, it is the responsibility of the student to complete any and all class requirements that are missed due to religious holidays.

There may be circumstances that necessitate a departure from this policy. Feel free to contact the WCAS at 617-552-3900 for consultation.

**Deadlines**

Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the specified dates. Late assignments will be graded accordingly.

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**Course Schedule**

I recommend that you complete the reading assignments following the schedule listed below. In using the coursepack in previous semesters, this sequence has proven to be the most helpful for students to understand the readings when studying for an examination. In addition, we will discuss the materials in class following this sequence of reading assignments.

**June 24:**

Introduction to Crisis Communication  
(No Reading)

In-Class: Discussion of the GEICO Case

Please bring your coursepack to class in the future

**June 26:**

Fishman, Berg & Robb, "Crisis Management and the Paradigm Case," 77-93

Fishman, Ten Berge, The Tylenol Poisonings," 95-109

Background: Information related to The Exxon Case

**July 1:**

Fishman/William J. Small, Exxon Valdez, How to Spend Billions and Still Get a Black Eye," 125-142
Discussion of British Petroleum Oil Spill

Theory Models:

Fishman, Introduction to Theory, 169-177

Fishman/Fink, Stage Analysis (handout)

Fishman/Benoit, Image Restoration Theory and the concept of strategies, 177-188

July 3:

Theoretical Models Continued:

Fishman/Birkland, 201-208
Fishman/Birkland, 209-240

Fishman/Downs, Issue-Attention Cycle, 241-253-

Second Part of the Class:

Technological Disasters

Fishman/Lerbinger, 297-318
Fishman, Vaughn, 325-334

July 8:

Natural Disasters/FEMA

Fishman/Lerbinger, 335-367
Fishman/Sobel & Leeson (On FEMA), 375-393
Fishman/Lotke & Borosage (On FEMA), 395-406

• Discuss the Evidence Kit and Prospectus
• Distribute the Prep Sheet for the Midterm

July 10:

Whistleblowing:

Fishman/Barton, 283-296

July 15:

Apologies:

Fishman, 409-411
Fishman, Benoit, 413-429
Fishman, Kobe Bryant, 433-437

Discuss the Prep Sheet and overview of the exam

July 17: No Class: Instructor at the Jesuit Conference at Santa Clara University

July 22: Midterm Examination
Special in-class prep session from 6:15-7:00 p.m. Testing Period begins promptly at 7:00 p.m.

July 24: Evidence Kits Due

July 29: Evidence Kit Returned. This is a very important class. We will go over the guidelines for writing the research paper. Everyone should pick-up a copy of the 2013 Style Sheet Guidelines before they leave class tonight.

Read, Fishman, 521-541: The Nike Sweatshop Scandal. Questions on p. 541

Bring the Diana Hacker book to class tonight for an in-class assignment

• APA Footnote Format Discussed
• Sample Footnote Assignment in Class
• Research Design Discussed

Please Bring the Coursepack to Class tonight.

Midterm Grades Returned

July 31: Research Paper Due: Submit two copies of your research paper. Follow the Style Sheet guidelines discussed in class; see pages 619-626 of the Coursepack. See sample papers on pages 627-651 & 652-672.
Students who want their papers returned should leave a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and I will mail the papers back to you by Monday, August 19th.

Syllabus may have minor changes in the readings during the semester,