COMM 444901/Crisis Communication
3 Credits; Summer, 2015

Instructor: Dr. Donald Fishman
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Class Times: TTH 6:00-9:15 p.m.
Room: To Be Announced

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 worldview 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 value 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 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 Newtown, CT. This course fulfills the requirements for a writing-intensive seminar in the Department of Communication at Boston College.

Course Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify natural history theories, strategies-based theories, and miscellaneous theoretical approaches to crisis communication.

2. Students will apply theories and constructs to real-life case studies of crisis events that have occurred during the past thirty years.

3. Students will demonstrate an ethical competency in the detection of messages by management to explain the causes and effects of a crisis situation.

4. Students will develop a competency in conducting original research and writing an analytical paper that examines a crisis situation.

5. Students will be able to demonstrate an ethical knowledge of and an understanding of the legal context of public relations as demonstrated in the readings and class discussions.

6. Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of crisis events across cultural settings and will explore the impact of culture and technology on changing standards and practices of communication.

Computation of the Course Grade

The approximate breakdown of points awarded during the course is as follows: Two-Thirds Term Examination, forty percent; Research Paper, forty percent; Evidence Kit, 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 consists 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.

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.

Text/Readings (Required)

Each student should have a copy of the following two books: Donald Fishman, Readings in Crisis Communication (Chestnut Hill, BC Press, 2015); Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers A Writer’s Reference with Writing in the Disciplines, Seventh Edition (Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 2011). Please ask for the latest edition.
updated version of the Hacker & Sommers 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 that they have read.

Examinations

There will be only one examination in this course: a Two-Thirds Term Examination. The examination will include objective questions, true-false questions, and short-answer questions. A more precise description of the examination will be presented during an in-class prep session that will be held prior to the examination. There also will be a prep sheet distributed prior to the examination that contains sample questions.

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 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 correctives 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 to 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.

**Course Schedule**

Please bring your coursepack to class each time: Donald Fishman, *Readings in Crisis Communication* (BC Press, 2015).

**June 22:**

Introduction to Crisis Communication  
(No Reading Due)
• In Class Discussion of the GEICO Case

June 24:

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

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

June 29:

Fishman/William J. Small, "Exxon Valdez, How to Spend Billions and Still Get a Black Eye," 125-142

Discussion of the 2010 British Petroleum Oil Spill

July 1:

Fishman/Fink & Meyers," Stage Analysis," 151-160

Fishman/Benoit, "Image Restoration Theory" (Strategies Theory), 161-170

Fishman/Birkland, 201-208, 209-240

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

July 6:

Fishman/Whistleblowing, 283-296

Fishman/Technological Disasters, Lerbinger, 297-318; Vaughn, 325-334

July 8:

Fishman/Natural Disasters, Lerbinger 335-367
Fishman/Sobel & Lesson (On FEMA), 375-393

Fishman/Lotke & Borosage (On FEMA), 395-406

Distribute Prep Sheet for Two-Thirds Term Examination; Discuss Evidence Kit

July 13:
Fishman/Apologies, Tyler 143-165
Fishman/Benoit, 413-429
Fishman/Kobe Bryant, 433-437
Lecture on the Evidence Kit and Guidelines for the Research paper

July 15: Evidence Kit Due

July 20: Two-Thirds Term Examination Evidence Kit Returned

July 22: No Class: Instructor at the Jesuit Conference

July 27: Organizing the Research Paper; Continued Discussion of the Style Sheet; Writing Workshop

July 29: Research Papers are Due: Submit two copies of your research paper. Follow the Style Sheet guidelines discussed in class; see pages 507-519 of the coursepack

Students who want their papers returned should leave a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and I will mail the papers back to you as soon as possible.