MDIA3008

Issues and Crisis Communication

Term Two // 2020

Course Overview

Staff Contact Details

Convenors

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Tutors

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School Contact Information

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The School of the Arts and Media would like to Respectfully Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians, the Bedegal (Kensington campus), Gadigal (City and Art & Design Campuses) and the Ngunnawal people (Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra) of the lands where each campus of UNSW is located.

Course Details

Credit Points 6

Summary of the Course

Subject Area: *Media*

This course examines the interdisciplinary and relational nature of issues and crisis communication from conceptual and practical perspectives.

Issues management is a managerial process that acts to provide a response strategy and early warning tool for issues that have the potential to impact organisations. The successful management of issues reduces the likelihood of crisis. Crisis management is the related process involving the development and application of strategies aimed at helping an organisation successfully deal with a sudden and negative event.

Issues and crisis communication refers to the PR-specific practices that emerge from these processes.

Through a range of case studies, this course will explore how issues and crisis impact upon organisations across the business, community, government, and not-for-profit sectors, and will engage in depth with the role of issues and crisis management and communication in strategic planning.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Conceptualise the significance and functions of issues and crisis communication in an organisational setting.
2. Provide detailed analyses of issues and crisis communication at a conceptual and strategic level.
3. Understand the key principles behind designing and developing a crisis communication plan.
4. Think strategically about the role/s of various publics and stakeholders in issues/crisis communication cases.
5. Assess and evaluate the impact of the media in issues and crisis communication in an in-depth fashion.

Teaching Strategies

This is a level three course. It builds on skills developed in level 1 and 2 courses. It will allow students to develop diverse conceptual and strategic skills in PR and professional practice.

Both lectures and tutorials will be open to dialogue and collaboration with the aim of exploring case studies and material in a productive and rigorous fashion.

This course is NOT about rote learning, but rather involves actively thinking about and engaging with a number of conceptual frameworks, professional skills, case studies, analytical material, and strategic plans. Students are expected to take control of their own learning, rather than passively expect information to be delivered to them.

Assessment

This ACOA document is intended primarily as a policy document - please refer to the Comprehensive Course Guide section on the Moodle site for complete information on the course.

Assessment Tasks

Assessment task	Weight	Due Date	Student Learning Outcomes Assessed
Short Essay	25%	Friday, June 19	1,4,5
Presentation	25%	Week 3 Onwards	1,2,4,5
Critical Analysis OR Crisis Communication Plan	50%	Friday, August 7	1,2,3,4,5

Assessment Details

Assessment 1: Short Essay

Start date: Not Applicable

Length: 800-1000 words

Details:

This assessment is intended to test your developing understanding of the related functions of issues and crisis communications AND your ability to communicate this clearly and effectively. Feedback will be provided via LMS. 800 to 1,000 words.

Additional details:

Choose ONE essay question to respond to. Each option has the Covid-19 pandemic as a backdrop:

1. During the Covid-19 pandemic, how and why was stakeholder theory important for managing the crisis communications? Remember: this question is about issues/crisis COMMUNICATION.

2. How and why are messaging strategies important for issues and/or crisis communications? Again, use the pandemic as a backdrop.

3. How does the pandemic underline the importance of issues and/or crisis communications for contemporary organisations and companies?

You are expected to engage with the readings and lecture materials to date, and provide a clear conceptually rigorous response from an academic perspective. A sound theoretical knowledge will provide the base for you to acquire an effective sense of operational requirements as well as to develop a useable toolkit of practical strategic/tactical competencies as you enter the communications/PR

industry.

You are advised to choose your question with care, as they pose different challenges.

You can take the perspective of any organisation, or public who were affected during the pandemic.

Assessment Criteria:

- Proper and fluent written expression
- Development of a conceptually coherent and thoughtful essay
- Productive engagement, with relevant developments, perspectives and conceptual frameworks
- Accurate and properly presented referencing
- Professional visual presentation and formatting

Submission notes: Via Turnitin

Turnitin setting: This assignment is submitted through Turnitin and students do not see Turnitin similarity reports.

Assessment 2: Presentation

Start date: Week 3 Onwards

Details:

You will be assigned into a small group (four people) and allocated a week to give a press conference that addresses the week's topic. In your press conference, your group is required to critically examine a case study of your choice that is relevant to that week's topic. So, for instance, the group in week 5 will analyse their case study through a 'crisis planning' lens – planning being the topic for that particular week. The press conference is a group assessment, and you are expected to work in collaboration. Your group will present for 10 minutes x number of people in the group (e.g. 4 group members, 40 minutes).

Additional details:

You should treat this task as a means to practice putting together and preparing a professional client presentation. Whn delivering presentations at university level, a common weakness is to simply talk through a collection of points, or recap the week's material. For this task, you will be assessed on the quality of your presentation skills, and the quality of your insights. Not simply how well you can summarise the course materials. Audience members will play the role of journalists, and so are expected to take a participatory role. Your tutor will hold your group strictly to the time limit.

You are advised to follow this general format with your presentation:
1. Introduction: What are you talking about? Why is this topic relevant (why should people care?) How are you approaching the topic (what is your approach and methodology)?

2. Overview: What are the key contexts? What are the most important developments? Which are the key

aspects of the issue/crisis?

3. Analysis/Recommendations: What are the key mistakes and/or key successes with regards to the communications strategy? How can you substantiate your analysis? What would you recommend? What are your insights? How can you support your findings with relevant research and/or theoretical frameworks?

4. Conclusion: What are the key points/arguments you want to leave with your audience?

Working in a small group will be a common activity for working in the communications/PR industry. A key premise behind the assessment is for you to treat the complexities and uncertainties of group dynamics and interactions as a fundamental aspect of the learning process - as a valuable opportunity for practicing and mastering an activity that you will need to be proficient with.

Assessment Criteria:

- Ability to work professionally as a team to take charge and to lead a presentation.
- Ability to select and develop an appropriate case study, with scope for analysis.
- Ability to coherently and persuasively communicate key ideas and points.
- Ability to provide an effective and succinct overview, showing strong understanding of the relevant industry contexts and the case study's inherent issues.
- Ability to provide meaningful insights, analysis and/or recommendations properly supported by relevant concepts. data and theory.
- Ability to respond clearly and effectively when questioned by audience members.

Assessment 3: Critical Analysis OR Crisis Communication Plan

Start date: Not Applicable

Length: Critical Analysis (2000-2500), OR Crisis Communications Plan (3500-4000)

Details:

There are two choices available in terms of this major project. You can submit an individual Critical Analysis (2,000 to 2,500 words), OR submit a Crisis Communication Plan as a collaborative pair (3,500-4,000 words; students will be given an individual grade). This is the final assessment task. Feedback will be provided via LMS.

Additional details:

This major assessment will be worth a substantial percentage of your final mark. It has been deliberately designed this way, as working in the communications/PR industry will be dependent on the success of major projects you are involved with. Some time will be set aside in classes in order to workshop the assessment.

For the critical analysis, your task will be to analyse ONE case study. A selection of three possible case studies will be posted on Moodle approximately two weeks before the assessment deadline. This is intended to provide some semblance of the time pressures, spontaneity and lack of foresight that

characterise crises and issues. These case studies will be drawn from actual events and will have occurred within the past two years.

A suggested format is as follows:

- Introduction: What's the case study and why is it relevant for issues/crisis communicators? How are you approaching the topic? What is your methodology? Do you have one, or two effective research questions, or hypotheses to apply? Is there a specific theoretical foundation such as IRT, SCCT that you will use?
- Overview: What are the key contexts? What are the most important developments? Which are the key aspects of the issue/crisis and why?
- Analysis/Recommendations: What are the key mistakes and/or key successes with regards to the communications strategy? What would you recommend? What are your insights? How can you support your points, with relevant facts, data and/or theoretical frameworks?
- Conclusion: What are the key takeaways?

For the Critical Analysis, you will be required to adhere to proper academic conventions. You are expected to draw on relevant readings and course materials. Use of external readings and sources as supplementary material will be of benefit.

Assessment Criteria (Critical Analysis)

- Ability to develop a clearly argued, well-researched and conceptually solid perspective on your case study
- Ability to show strong understanding of relevant principles and theoretical frameworks behind issues/crisis communications
- Ability to provide meaningful and properly supported analysis and/or recommendations
- Fluent and coherent written expression
- Accurate and properly presented referencing
- Professional visual presentation and formatting

For a Crisis Communications Plan, you will be working as a collaborative pair, with a partner of your choice. Both parties will receive the same mark/grade, so please choose your partner carefully. (*You do NOT have the option of working on this task individually, as Crisis Communication Plans are typically produced by small teams of people working together in a collaborative fashion; hence why you are required to work with a partner for this task*.)

For this task, you are required to create a comprehensive, effective, and clearly navigable Crisis Communication Plan for a company or organisation. (You are advised to choose a small-to-medium enterprise.) *Please refer to the assessment criteria below*.

This company/organisation needs to be an actual corporate entity, which will need to sign off on the project by way of a signed letter from a company representative holding a senior management position, confirming that: (1.) They are giving you permission to create a Crisis Comms Plan for the company/organisation; (2.) The company/organisation does not have a pre-existing Crisis Comms Plan.

For the Crisis Communication Plan, you will be required to adhere to accepted industry practice conventions. While you are expected to make productive use of relevant readings and lecture materials, and to use external readings and sources as supplementary material if you wish – these do not need to be explicitly cited in the Plan, as it is intended to be a professional business report, not an academic piece of writing. You will be learning about the various elements of a Crisis Communication plan

throughout the course, and key aspects will be discussed during the lectures. Some useful resources will also be available on Moodle.

* Each pair should submit ONE Crisis Communication Plan to Turnitin. The other student should simply submit ONLY a cover page, with basic information such as your name, student number, and the details of your partner.

Assessment Criteria (Crisis Communication Plan):

- Relevant selection and overview of the organisation in need of a Crisis Communication Plan.
- Appropriate coverage of and engagement with organisational history, reputation, goals, and industry context.
- Effective identification and analysis of the organisation's key risks and issues.
- Ability to effectively put together and present the necessary components of a comprehensive Crisis Plan relevant to your selected organisation.
- Fluent and coherent written expression.
- Professional visual presentation, in accordance with the conventions of a business report format.

Submission notes: There are separate Turnitin submission boxes for the Critical Analysis/Crisis Comms Plan

Turnitin setting: This assignment is submitted through Turnitin and students do not see Turnitin similarity reports.

Attendance Requirements

Students are strongly encouraged to attend all classes and review lecture recordings.

Course Schedule

[View class timetable](#)

Timetable

Date	Type	Content
Week 1: 1 June - 5 June	Lecture	Introduction to issues and crisis communications
	Tutorial	Introduction to Issues and Crisis Communications
Week 2: 8 June - 12 June	Lecture	Communicating in crisis to stakeholders
	Tutorial	Communicating in crisis to stakeholders
Week 3: 15 June - 19 June	Lecture	Utilising frames and key messages
	Tutorial	Utilising frames and key messages
Week 4: 22 June - 26 June	Lecture	Organisational crisis communications
	Tutorial	Organisational crisis communications
Week 5: 29 June - 3 July	Lecture	Crisis communication planning
	Tutorial	Crisis communication planning
Week 6: 6 July - 10 July	Lecture	No lecture - READING WEEK
	Tutorial	No tutorials - READING WEEK
Week 7: 13 July - 17 July	Lecture	Theoretical frameworks: IRT & SCCT
	Tutorial	Theoretical frameworks: IRT & SCCT
Week 8: 20 July - 24 July	Lecture	Health Crisis Communications
	Tutorial	Health Crisis Communications
Week 9: 27 July - 31 July	Lecture	The Internet and social media
	Tutorial	*The Internet and Social Media*
Week 10: 3 August - 7 August	Lecture	Leadership and the nature of transboundary crises
	Tutorial	Leadership and the nature of transboundary crises

Resources

Prescribed Resources

- Website – Resources will be available on the Course Moodle website.
- Online tutorials - via the Blackboard Collaborate LMS.

Recommended Resources

Further Reading

Alpaslan C et al, 2009, 'Corporate Governance in the Context of Crises: Towards a Stakeholder Theory of Crisis Management', *Journal of Contingencies & Crisis Management*, 17, (1) pp38 – 49.

Coombs, W.T. & Holladay, S.J. (Eds.), 2001, *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, edited by Malden, MA: Blackwell

Galloway, C. & Kwanash-Aidoo, K., 2009, *Public Relations Issues and Crisis Management*, Melbourne: Thomson Social Science Press

Gilpin, D.R. & Murphy, P.J., 2008, *Crisis Management in a Complex World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Griffin, A., 2009, *New Strategies for Reputation Management: Gaining Control of Issues, Crises and Corporate Social Responsibility*, London: Kogan Page

Heath, R. & Palenchar, M.J., 2008, *Strategic Issues Management: Organisations and Public Policy Challenges,* 2nd edition, California, Thousand Oaks: Sage

Heath, R.L. & O'Hair, H.D. (Eds.), 2009, *Handbook of Risk and Crisis Communication*, New York: Routledge

Howard, C., 1984, *Issues Management: Origins of the future*, Stamford, CT: Issue Action Publishers

Jaques, T., 2014, *Issue and Crisis Management: Exploring Issues, Crises, Risk and Reputation*, South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press

Regester, M. & Larkin, J., 2008, *Risk Issues and Crisis Management in Public Relations: A Casebook of Best Rractice*, 4th edition, London: CIPR

Toth, E.L. (Ed.), 2007, *The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management: Challenges for the Next Generation*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Young, K, 2018, 'Enhancing employee communication behaviors for sensemaking and sensegiving in crisis situations', Journal of Communication Management, 22, (4) pp451 – 475.

Recommended Publications

Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal

Journal of Business Communication

Journal of Business Ethics

Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management

Journal of Communication Management

Journal of Public Relations Research

Public Relations Review

* This is a list of supplementary reading resources, which may be helpful in doing further research. You are, of course, encouraged to move beyond these suggested texts.

Course Evaluation and Development

Your feedback gathered from the surveys at the end of the session offers valuable input. Your experiences and suggestions are important, and there is always room for improvement in terms of content and teaching strategies.

Submission of Assessment Tasks

Turnitin Submission

If you encounter a problem when attempting to submit your assignment through Turnitin, please telephone External Support on 9385 3331 or email them on externalteltsupport@unsw.edu.au . Support hours are 8:00am – 10:00pm on weekdays and 9:00am – 5:00pm on weekends (365 days a year). If you are unable to submit your assignment due to a fault with Turnitin you may apply for an extension, but you must retain your ticket number from External Support (along with any other relevant documents) to include as evidence to support your extension application. If you email External Support you will automatically receive a ticket number, but if you telephone you will need to specifically ask for one. Turnitin also provides updates on their system status on Twitter.

Generally, assessment tasks must be submitted electronically via either Turnitin or a Moodle assignment. In instances where this is not possible, it will be stated on your course's Moodle site with alternative submission details.

For information on how to submit assignments online via Moodle: https://student.unsw.edu.au/how-submit-assignment-moodle

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of others and presenting them as your own. It can take many forms, from deliberate cheating to accidentally copying from a source without acknowledgement.

UNSW groups plagiarism into the following categories:

Copying: using the same or very similar words to the original text or idea without acknowledging the source or using quotation marks. This also applies to images, art and design projects, as well as presentations where someone presents another's ideas or words without credit.

Inappropriate paraphrasing: Changing a few words and phrases while mostly retaining the original structure and/or progression of ideas of the original, and information without acknowledgement. This also applies in presentations where someone paraphrases another's ideas or words without credit and to piecing together quotes and paraphrases into a new whole, without appropriate referencing.

Collusion: working with others but passing off the work as a person's individual work. Collusion also includes providing your work to another student before the due date, or for the purpose of them plagiarising at any time, paying another person to perform an academic task, stealing or acquiring another person's academic work and copying it, offering to complete another person's work or seeking payment for completing academic work.

Inappropriate citation: Citing sources which have not been read, without acknowledging the "secondary" source from which knowledge of them has been obtained.

Duplication ("self-plagiarism"): submitting your own work, in whole or in part, where it has previously been prepared or submitted for another assessment or course at UNSW or another university.

Correct referencing practices:

- Paraphrasing, summarising, essay writing and time management
- Appropriate use of and attribution for a range of materials including text, images, formulae and concepts.

Individual assistance is available on request from The Learning Centre (http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/). Students are also reminded that careful time management is an important part of study and one of the identified causes of plagiarism is poor time management. Students should allow sufficient time for research, drafting and proper referencing of sources in preparing all assessment items.

UNSW Library also has the ELISE tool available to assist you with your study at UNSW. ELISE is designed to introduce new students to studying at UNSW but it can also be a great refresher during your study.

Completing the ELISE tutorial and quiz will enable you to:

- analyse topics, plan responses and organise research for academic writing and other assessment tasks
- effectively and efficiently find appropriate information sources and evaluate relevance to your needs
- use and manage information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- better manage your time

- understand your rights and responsibilities as a student at UNSW
- be aware of plagiarism, copyright, UNSW Student Code of Conduct and Acceptable Use of UNSW ICT Resources Policy
- be aware of the standards of behaviour expected of everyone in the UNSW community
- locate services and information about UNSW and UNSW Library

Some of these areas will be familiar to you, others will be new. Gaining a solid understanding of all the related aspects of ELISE will help you make the most of your studies at UNSW.
http://subjectguides.library.unsw.edu.au/elise/aboutelise

Academic Information

For essential student information relating to:

- requests for extension;
- late submissions guidelines;
- review of marks;
- UNSW Health and Safety policies;
- examination procedures;
- special consideration in the event of illness or misadventure;
- student equity and disability;
- and other essential academic information, see

https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/current-students/academic-information/protocols-guidelines/

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05/04/2020

By Robbin Laird

CRICOS

CRICOS Provider Code: 00098G

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bedegal people who are the traditional custodians of the lands on which UNSW Kensington campus is located.