School of the Arts and Media

MDIA3008: ISSUES & CRISIS COMMUNICATION

COURSE OUTLINE

SEMESTER 1, 2014

CRICOS Provider no. 00098G
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Schedule: A Week at a Time</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the Course</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Details for Course Convener</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Details</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Aims</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and Learning Rationale</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Requirements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Evaluation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential Information for Students</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referencing Guidelines</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Submission Requirements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Tasks: Learning Outcomes &amp; Graduate Attributes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 1: Short Essay</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 2: Presentation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 3: Critical Analysis OR Crisis Communication Plan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Overview</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>3-7 March</th>
<th>Introduction to issues and crisis communications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Tutorials begin in Week 1.</strong></td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>10-14 March</td>
<td>A relational approach to issues and crises</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>17-21 March</td>
<td>Utilising frames and key messages</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>24-28 March</td>
<td>Communicating in crisis to stakeholders</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>31 March–4 April</td>
<td>Crisis communication planning</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>7-11 April</td>
<td>Image repair strategies</td>
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<td><strong>First Tutorial Leadership</strong></td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>14-17 April</td>
<td>Good Friday public holiday. <strong>No Lecture or Tutorials</strong> this week.</td>
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<td>21-25 April</td>
<td><strong>Non-Teaching Break</strong></td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>28 April-2 May</td>
<td>Situational crisis communication theory</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>5-9 May</td>
<td>The Internet and social media</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>12-16 May</td>
<td>Airline crises / Developing best practice</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>19-23 May</td>
<td>BP oil spill / Leadership during crisis</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
<td>26-30 May</td>
<td>SARS, flus, pandemics / Strategic responses</td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
<td>2-6 June</td>
<td>Sports and PR / Facing issues and crises</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Research Portfolio</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

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 significant negative event. Issues and crisis communication refers to the PR-specific practices that emerge from these processes. Through a range of case studies, the course will explore how issues and crises 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 Convener
Dr Collin Chua
Office: Webster Room 231K
Tel: 9385 5988
Email: c.chua@unsw.edu.au
Consultation time: TBA (consult times will be posted on Moodle.)

Tutoring Staff
Email:

Course Details

Six Units of Credit, Upper Level 3 Course

Lecture: Thu 13:00 – 14:30 (Biomedical Theatre C)
Tutorials: Friday 09:00 – 10:30 (Webster 332)
Friday 10:30 – 12:00 (Webster 332)
Friday 12:30 – 14:00 (Webster 332)

Course Aims

• Explore the importance of issue identification and environmental scanning,
• Gain an understanding of how to identify and assess emerging issues that may impact an organisation’s viability and reputation.
• Develop a solid knowledge of the concepts and practices underpinning issues and crisis management and communication.
• Conceptualise the role and purpose of crisis management and put into practice the principles of crisis communication.
• Gain skills required for developing a crisis communication strategy and for developing productive critiques of organisational responses to major crises.
• Understand how to apply the principles of corporate social responsibility to issues and crisis communication.
Learning Outcomes and Graduate Attributes

At the end of this course students be able to:

1. Appreciate the significance of issues and crisis communication in an organisational setting.
2. Make detailed analysis of crisis communication, including ethical and corporate social responsibility contexts.
3. Design and develop a crisis communication plan.
4. Understand the role of various publics and stakeholders in crisis communication cases.
5. Assess the impact of the media in crisis communication.

Teaching and Learning Rationale

This is a level 3 course. It builds on skills developed in levels 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.

Teaching Strategies

All students are expected to come each week to both lectures and tutorials well prepared with notes on the readings and case studies, together with any points of inquiry they want to pursue. The readings and case studies are intended to be thought provoking, and you will need to devote at least 2-3 hours per week to preparation. If you do not keep up with the readings and lecture material you will find it difficult to pass the course. The course is aimed at building productive and lively communities of inquiry in both lectures and tutorials.

The course will have a UNSW Moodle site, where you can find lecture notes and a range of other basic course resources. [https://moodle.telt.unsw.edu.au/login/index.php](https://moodle.telt.unsw.edu.au/login/index.php)

Course Reader

The Course Reader will be available from the University Bookshop. **YOU WILL NEED TO BRING THE COURSE READER TO LECTURES AND TUTORIALS.**
Attendance Requirements

You are required to attend the lectures and tutorials. In accordance with Faculty policy, if you miss more than 2 tutorials, or more than 2 lectures, you will fail the course.

Course Evaluation

Your feedback gathered from the CATEI 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.

Essential Information for Students

A webpage with essential information about UNSW policy and guidelines for SAM students can be accessed at: https://sam.arts.unsw.edu.au/students/resources/policies-guidelines/.

In this document, you will find important information on the following:

• Essay Writing Support Services
• Policies Regarding Late Work
• Procedure for Applying for Extensions
• Procedure for Applying for Special Consideration
• Procedures for Submitting Assessments
• Policy on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Referencing Guidelines

If required in the assessment criteria, written work must demonstrate the use of correct referencing. If you use an incorrect referencing system, your work will be marked down. This course will use the Harvard system: http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/ref.html

Assessment Submission Requirements

All students must submit both printed and electronic copies of their written work.

Submit a hard copy of your written assignments to the assignment drop-off box outside the SAM School office, Room 312, Level 3 of the Robert Webster building, with a cover sheet (available from the SAM School office and on Moodle) securely attached and your details clearly marked, by 4pm on the due date.

You are also required to submit an electronic copy of your written assignments to Turnitin, via Moodle. Click on ‘Assignments’ in the course Moodle page, and you will then see where you can submit each piece of assessment.
### Assessment Tasks: Learning Outcomes and Graduate Attributes

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<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes and Graduate Attributes</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Short Essay</td>
<td>1, 4, 5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Presentation</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 5</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>3a Critical Analysis OR</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b Crisis Comms Plan</td>
<td>1, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Refer to page 5 of this Outline for the list of Learning Outcomes and Graduate Attributes. There are two options for assessment task 3; only one needs to be attempted. Summaries of the three assessment tasks are provided in the following section.

### Assessments

*There are three assessment components: in order to pass the course you must seriously attempt and submit or fulfil all of its assessment components.*

1. **Short Essay (due 4pm, Wednesday 2 April, Week 5.)**

Value: 25%
Submission: SAM Essay Boxes, Turnitin
Word length: 1000-1500 words

*What is the relation between issues communication and crisis communication?*

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.

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 industry.

**Assessment Criteria:**

- Proper and fluent *written expression*.
- Development of a *conceptually coherent and thoughtful essay*.
- Productive *engagement* with relevant developments, perspectives, and conceptual frameworks from course readings and lectures.
- Accurate and properly presented *referencing*.
- Professional visual *presentation* and *formatting*. 
2. Presentation (starting from the Week 6 Tutorial.)

Value: 25%

You will be assigned into a small group (of three to four people), and allocated a week to make a Presentation that addresses the week’s topic. The Presentation is to be geared around a case study relevant to that week’s topic. The Presentation 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., 3 group members, 30 minutes).

Working in a small group will typically be a common activity for working in the industry. A key premise behind this assessment task 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 of practicing for and coming to terms with an activity that you will need to become proficient with.

Assessment Criteria:

- Ability to take charge and to lead the Presentation.
- Ability to select an appropriate case study.
- Ability to show an in-depth engagement with and understanding of the relevant industry contexts and issues relating to the selected case study.
- Ability to effectively identify and communicate key ideas and points.
- Ability to make productive use of relevant concepts and methodologies for strategic and tactical analysis.
- Ability to initiate and lead a productive discussion.
- Ability to work professionally and as a team.
3. Critical Analysis OR Crisis Communication Plan (due 4pm Thursday, 12 June, Week 14.)

Value: 50%
Submission: SAM Essay Boxes, Turnitin

This major assessment will be worth a substantial percentage of your final mark. It has been deliberately designed this way, as working in the industry will be dependent on the success of major projects you are involved with.

There are two choices available in terms of this major project. You can submit an individual Critical Analysis (2,500-3000 words), OR submit a Crisis Communication Plan as a collaborative pair (3,500-4000 words). If working in a pair, both parties will receive the same mark/grade, so please choose your partner carefully. Some time will be set aside in classes late in the semester, in order to workshop the major assessment.

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

Assessment Criteria (Critical Analysis):
• Relevant selection and coverage of a productive case study that occurred within the past five years that offers strong scope for analysis.
• Ability to show a strong understanding of relevant conceptual frameworks and tools from across the course.
• Ability to use relevant conceptual frameworks and tools productively to provide a thoughtful critique and/or to make specific strategic recommendations.
• Fluent and coherent written expression.
• Accurate and properly presented referencing.
• Professional visual presentation and formatting.

Assessment Criteria (Crisis Communication Plan):
• Relevant selection and overview of a hypothetical company/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.
**WEEKLY TIMETABLE**

**WEEK 1**

Introduction to issues and crisis communications

**Readings**


**Overview**

The lecture will present an overview of the course, as well as provide an introduction to the distinctive and specialised PR fields of issues and crisis communication, which can be traced to the disciplines of issues management and crisis management – specific processes in business management which have become increasingly important and demanding of attention in the past several decades. **Tutorials will begin in Week 1.**

**WEEK 2**

A relational approach to issues and crises

**Readings**


**Overview**

This week, we will examine the relationship between issues and crisis management, and issues and crisis communication. We will begin to look more deeply at the operational role and processes of these specialised sub-disciplines, while also engaging with some of the approaches, models and frameworks that have been developed within issues management and crisis management.
WEEK 3
Utilising frames and key messages

Readings


Overview

This week, we will engage with a fundamentally important aspect of issues and crisis communications – key messages. In order to develop a better understanding of how to conceptualise and construct key messages – which serve as essential tools in issues and crisis communication – we will look at framing theory, as well as the related approach of agenda setting. In the process, we will examine the notion of Corporate Social Responsibility, which has come to the forefront in many ways within the corporate world.

WEEK 4
Communicating in crisis to stakeholders

Readings


Overview

This week, we examine the notion of stakeholders, which is a key business term. We will engage with stakeholder theory, in terms of its relevance for issues and crisis management and issues and crisis communication. Why/how should we identify key stakeholder groups for a specific organisation/industry, and why/how can we tailor our communications and key messages effectively to target specific key stakeholder groups?
WEEK 5
Crisis communication planning

Readings

Overview
A Crisis Communication Plan is a key tool in crisis management and crisis communication. What actually goes into putting together a Crisis Communication Plan? What kinds of templates, overviews, lists, instructions, should be included? What are the components and necessary steps? Even if you do not choose the Crisis Communication Plan option for your major assessment, knowing how to put together a good Crisis Communication Plan is an essential part of the discipline.

WEEK 6
Image repair strategies

Readings


Overview
This week, we will tackle one of the two influential theoretical approaches within crisis communications – an approach sometimes called Image Repair Theory (IRT). We will look again at reputation management as a key aspect of crisis communication, and explore how the Image Repair Theory approach provides a practical toolkit that can be used to develop strategic recommendations and responses for actual case studies and crises.

*There will be NO Lecture and NO Tutorials in Week 7.*
WEEK 8
Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Readings


Overview

This week, we will tackle the second of the two prominent theoretical approaches within crisis communications – an approach called Situational Crisis Communication Theory, developed in some ways as an attempt to advance beyond Image Repair Theory. We will explore how this approach provides a diagnostic toolkit that can be used to develop strategic recommendations and responses for actual case studies and crises.

WEEK 9
The impact of the internet and social media

Readings


Overview

The advent and popularisation of the internet and social media has had a substantial impact on issues and crisis management and issues and crisis communication. This week, we will explore the practical implications of how the internet and social media have impacted upon issues/crisis communication. Does the internet and social media actually exacerbate issues and crises? How has social media strategizing grown in importance?
### WEEK 10
Airline crises / Developing best practice

**Readings**


**Overview**

A primary and ongoing goal in this course is to develop a sense of ‘best practice’ in issues/crisis communication. In the remaining three weeks of the course, we will focus more on a number of case studies, while applying the tools acquired to date in the course, and while continuing to develop this sense of ‘best practice’. This week’s case study is the JetBlue Airways Valentine’s Day Crisis of 2007.

### WEEK 11
BP Deepwater Horizon Explosion / Leadership during crisis

**Readings**

Harlow, William Forrest, and Rachel Martin Harlow, 2013, ‘Compensation and Corrective Action as the BP Response to the Deepwater Horizon Incident’, *Communication Research Reports*, 30:3, pp. 193-200


**Overview**

This week’s case study is the BP Deepwater Horizon Explosion that resulted in a catastrophic oil spill, which occurred in 2010. We will be dissecting and critiquing the response of BP during this crisis, and examining a number of facets involved in shaping public perception, such as external and internal stakeholder relations, key messages, the consequences of BP’s prior reputation, and the importance of effective leadership during crisis.
**WEEK 12**  
SARS, flu and pandemics / Strategic responses

Readings


Overview

This week, we will focus on the 2002/2003 SARS outbreak, which began in China and rapidly spread to Asia and other parts of the globe. In the lecture, we will explore and compare the responses of governments as they struggled to manage public perception of the crisis, paying particular attention to Hong Kong and Singapore. What are the strategic lessons that we can take away?

**WEEK 13**  
Sports and PR / Facing issues and crises

Readings


Overview

This week, we will focus on the arena of Sports PR in relation to issues and crisis, paying particular attention to a central issue that is specific to Sports PR, and which has too often become compounded to explode into crisis – the issue of player transgression. We will explore the distinct strategies and practices required for issues and crisis communication with Sports PR, discussing a few case studies from Australia and America.
Suggested Reading List


**Journals**

*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 suggested readings, which may be helpful in doing further research. You are, of course, encouraged to move beyond these suggested texts.