

## COMS 408/508 Requested Changes

I request to change both the description and competencies for this course. This course was originally conceptualized as two distinct halves (corporate advocacy which relates to crisis management and legal advocacy). However, the subject of legal advocacy did not develop in the discipline of communication. At the time that the legal advocacy portion of the course was dropped, no textbooks for the subject area were available in print. The changes below reflect the way in which this course is currently taught.

### Course Description:

**COMS 408 Crisis Management in Organizations (3-0-3), ~~spring, even years~~fall.** Examines the theory and practice of crisis management in organizations ~~communication strategies in corporate and legal advocacy processes~~ from both social science and rhetorical perspectives. ~~Legal advocacy emphasizes attorney courtroom communication and juror decision making, while corporate advocacy emphasizes crisis communication and reputational management in organizations.~~ Using a case study approach and best practices for crisis management, students explore how to use communication to prevent, mitigate, and learn from crises in a way that benefits both organizations and stakeholders.

### Old course objectives:

Upon completing the course, undergraduates and graduates should:

- be aware of the nature and importance of communication in the context of corporate and legal advocacy; (measured by exams)
- understand the ways in which relevant communication theory and social science research enhance our understanding of corporate and legal advocacy; (measured by exams)
- understand ethical challenges faced by the Christian advocate in corporate and legal environments (measured by exams); and
- be able to apply relevant theories to specific corporate and legal advocacy situations (measured by exams, mock trial, and case study).

In addition to the above objectives, upon completing the course, graduates should have an in-depth understanding of published research in at least one area related to corporate or legal advocacy (measured by literature review).

## Revised Course Objectives:

| <i>General Course Objectives:</i>                                                                                    | <i>Measured by:</i>                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Understand crisis management theory and its importance                                                               | Exams                                                                      |
| Understand the role of communication in crisis management                                                            | Exams; Lessons in Crises Cases Studies; Crisis Analysis and Response Paper |
| Be able to apply various communication theories and empirical research findings to the practice of crisis management | Exams; Lessons in Crises Cases Studies; Crisis Analysis and Response Paper |
| Be able to effectively apply principles for managing uncertainty, communication, and leadership in crises            | Lessons in Crises Cases Studies                                            |
| <i>Pre-crisis objectives:</i>                                                                                        | <i>Measured by:</i>                                                        |
| Know how to scan and monitor for crisis warning signals                                                              | Exam 1                                                                     |
| <i>Crisis objectives:</i>                                                                                            | <i>Measured by:</i>                                                        |
| Know components of an effective crisis response                                                                      | Crisis Analysis and Response Paper; Exam 2                                 |
| Use theory and research to analyze crisis messages for degree of effectiveness                                       | Lessons in Crises Cases Studies; Crisis Analysis and Response Paper; Exams |
| Understand ethical constraints on messages in crisis situations.                                                     | Crisis Analysis and Response Paper; Exam 2                                 |
| <i>Post-crisis objectives:</i>                                                                                       | <i>Measured by:</i>                                                        |
| Understand the opportunities organizations can gain from crises                                                      | Exam 2                                                                     |

Note that requirements for assignments are more rigorous for graduate students than undergraduates.

**Crisis Management in Organizations, COMS 408/508**  
**Abilene Christian University**  
**Dr. Lynette Sharp Penya**  
**Fall 2015, TR 9:30-10:50, Sherrod Building 216**

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**Office Hours:** MWF 1:00-3:00, T 1:30-3:00, & by appointment

**ACU mission statement:** "To educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world."

**Catalog Description:** (3-0-3), fall. Examines the theory and practice of crisis management in organizations from both social science and rhetorical perspectives. Using a case study approach and best practices for crisis management, students explore how to use communication to prevent, mitigate, and learn from crises in a way that benefits both organizations and stakeholders.

**Credits:** 3 hours upper level undergraduate credit, or 3 hours graduate level credit

**Prerequisites:** none

**Course Description:** According to Weick (1988), "Crises are characterized by low probability/high consequence events that threaten the most fundamental goals of an organization" (p. 305).<sup>1</sup> Hurricane Sandy, the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings, the Pen State Sex Scandal, the US Embassy attack in Libya, Japan's nuclear crisis, BP's oil spill, the national and international banking collapse of 2008-2009, 9/11, California wildfires, salmonella-tainted jalapenos, Chinese toy imports containing lead paint, Enron, and Merck's anti-inflammatory drug Vioxx are a few examples of the intentional and unintentional crises that surround us. These crises may threaten, among other things, the environment; stakeholders' health, jobs, and lives; and an organization's financial stability and existence. Therefore, it is crucial that we understand how to use communication to manage and create opportunities from crises.

Throughout this course, we will explore theory and research involved in planning, communicating, and managing crises in organizations. By the end of this course, you should have developed a deeper understanding of 1) the crises organizations face and their implications and 2) how organizations can ethically use messages to create more favorable environments and outcomes through crisis management.

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<sup>1</sup> Weick, K. E. (1988). Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations, *Journal of Management Studies*, 25 (4), p. 305-317.

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                      |                                                                            |
| Understand crisis management theory and its importance                                                               | Exams                                                                      |
| Understand the role of communication in crisis management                                                            | Exams; Lessons in Crises Cases Studies; Crisis Analysis and Response Paper |
| Be able to apply various communication theories and empirical research findings to the practice of crisis management | Exams; Lessons in Crises Cases Studies; Crisis Analysis and Response Paper |
| Be able to effectively apply principles for managing uncertainty, communication, and leadership in crises            | Lessons in Crises Cases Studies                                            |
| <i>Pre-crisis objectives:</i>                                                                                        | <i>Measured by:</i>                                                        |
| Know how to scan and monitor for crisis warning signals                                                              | Exam 1                                                                     |
| <i>Crisis objectives:</i>                                                                                            | <i>Measured by:</i>                                                        |
| Know components of an effective crisis response                                                                      | Crisis Analysis and Response Paper; Exam 2                                 |
| Use theory and research to analyze crisis messages for degree of effectiveness                                       | Lessons in Crises Cases Studies; Crisis Analysis and Response Paper; Exams |
| Understand ethical constraints on messages in crisis situations.                                                     | Crisis Analysis and Response Paper; Exam 2                                 |
| <i>Post-crisis objectives:</i>                                                                                       | <i>Measured by:</i>                                                        |
| Understand the opportunities organizations can gain from crises                                                      | Exam 2                                                                     |

Note that requirements for assignments are more rigorous for graduate students than undergraduates.

**Required Texts:** The following materials will be used throughout the course of the semester.

- Coombs, W. T. (2015). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2015). *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Other readings may be posted throughout the semester in OpenClass.

### Course Requirements and Policies

- **Course Communication:** All written course documentation (e.g., syllabus, assignments, etc.) will be available on OpenClass. Additionally, you will be able to communicate with me and other students using the email button in OpenClass. You will receive email from me and other students periodically. Therefore, you should check your ACU email account on a regular basis. If you do not use your ACU email account, you need to forward your ACU email to whatever account you use. If you need help in forwarding your email, please contact Team 55.
- **Attendance:** You should be prepared to ask and answer questions, provide thoughtful commentary, and engage in meaningful discussions of the assigned readings by the due dates listed in the syllabus. This will require that you do more than “skim” the reading material. You are responsible for any information you miss in class (e.g., missed notes or assignments, changes to the syllabus, returned assignments/exams, etc.). If you are absent (excused or unexcused) for more than 20% of class time during the semester, then you should withdraw from the course. If you are still enrolled in the course at the end of the semester, then you will be assigned an “F” regardless of your performance in the course. This policy will be enforced if you have 7 or more absences.
- **Technology:** To earn “Daily Work” points, as discussed below, you need to be fully engaged during class. To that end, you should not use iPods, iPads, mobile devices, cell phones, or other electronic devices in class (unless requested to do so by me). Use of such devices is distracting to you, other students, and me. In the very least, you will be counted absent if you use these devices in class. (Please note if you have an exceptional circumstance for using one of these devices in class, you should talk with me for prior approval.)

If you bring a laptop to class, you should use it for work related to the course. Please refrain from engaging in non-classroom related activities (e.g., checking email, surfing the Internet, updating Facebook, etc.).

If you feel you must engage in unapproved activities, please leave your technology-related devices at home.

- **Due Dates, Assignments, & Exams:** Following is the policy for due dates and a short synopsis of each type of assignment.

**Due dates:** Due dates for all readings and assignments are listed in the Daily Schedule. I will not announce due dates for anything in class unless I am making a change to the Daily Schedule. All assignments must be presented or turned in in class on the assigned date. If you will be absent for a university-sponsored activity on the day an assignment is due, you must turn in the assignment before you leave, or it will not be accepted. Late work will not be accepted for a grade unless you have an "excused absence" (i.e., a documented, medical or family emergency). Unexcused late work or work not turned in prior to a university-related absence will receive a zero.

**Daily Work:** Throughout the semester, there will be a variety of in-class graded activities, discussions, and assignments. Some of these may require bringing materials to class (e.g., sample crisis) or some work outside of class. These activities/discussions/assignments will be worth 100 points each and in total, 5% of the final grade.

**Exams:** There will be two essay exams.

**Case Study:** You will complete one crisis case study in which you apply lessons you've learned to an actual crisis.

**Crisis Analysis and Response Paper:** You will use relevant communication theory and principles to analyze a recent organizational crisis. Your analysis will include an evaluation of the organization's response to the crisis and its effectiveness and suggest ways in which the organization could have managed and responded to the crisis more effectively. You will present your paper to the class. Please note that graduate student papers will have a more significant source requirement than undergraduate papers (see assignment for details).

- **Grading:**

| <u>Assignment</u>          | <u>Weight</u> | <u>Grading Scale</u> |
|----------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Daily Work                 | 5%            | 90%-100% = A         |
| Exams (midterm & final)    | 35%           | 80%-89% = B          |
| Case Study                 | 20%           | 70%-79% = C          |
| Crisis Analysis & Response | 40%           | 60%-69% = D          |
|                            |               | Below 60% = F        |

**Grading Scale with Measurement Standard Explanation:**

**A - Exceptional quality:** The student demonstrates excellent knowledge of the topic. The product is concise yet comprehensive, well organized, easily understood, and virtually error free. Arguments are clearly stated and well supported. It not only fulfills the assignment guidelines but also provides insightful analysis.

**B - Good quality:** The student communicates strong knowledge of the topic without gross errors. The argument is generally logical and is supported with solid examples and/or sources.

C - *Mediocre quality*: Errors in information and incomplete knowledge of the topic distract or interfere with the argument or presentation. The coverage is spotty with few, less than solid sources. The argument contains invalid components.

D - *Unacceptable quality*: The topic coverage is watered-down and disorganized, with major errors in the product. Significant holes exist in the argument. The student did not follow all guidelines.

F - *Failing quality*: The student does not communicate understanding of the topic. It is undeveloped with many grammatical errors. The student did not do the assignment according to the guidelines.

- **Academic dishonesty**: A zero-tolerance policy is in force regarding academic dishonesty. "Violations of academic integrity and other forms of cheating," as defined in ACU's Academic Integrity Policy, "involve the intention to deceive or mislead or misrepresent, and therefore are a form of lying."

More specifically, the Policy defines academic integrity as "academic work completed as assigned for each class by the individual or group responsible for the work. Academic work includes but is not limited to reading assignments, assessments, examinations and tests, attendance at required out-of-class activities, written or oral presentations, and laboratory experiments and research."

According to the Policy, "Expectations of academic honesty and integrity extend to both university employees and students. Every member of the community is responsible for protecting the integrity of learning, scholarship, and research. Being responsible requires action against violations in spite of peer pressure, loyalty, or compassion. Individuals must take responsibility for their own conduct and discourage misconduct by others." The full Academic Integrity Document is available for review on the Judicial Affairs' website.

Specific examples of academic dishonesty in this course include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Using others' ideas and words without proper documentation (i.e., failing to cite original sources of information);
- Using other students' work as your own (e.g., a previous student's case study or crisis analysis, not participating in group work but taking credit for it, exam answers, etc.);
- Falsifying information (e.g., fabricating sources and/or their content).
- Sharing, giving, and/or showing any written work you have completed to another student when it is an individual assignment (e.g., case study, crisis management plan, exam answers, etc.);
- Working with another person on an assignment when it is an individual assignment; and
- Allowing another person to copy your work in part or in whole.

Any degree of academic dishonesty will result (at the least) in an automatic zero for the assignment or exam. Any subsequent academic dishonesty will result in a failing

grade for the course. All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Chair of the Department of Communication, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and your department chair. See the full university policy, including how to appeal a decision, by following this link: <http://www.acu.edu/academics/provost/policies/index.html>.

- **ACU ADA Statement:** "Abilene Christian University is dedicated to removing barriers and opening access for students with disabilities in compliance with ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The Alpha Scholars Program facilitates disability accommodations in cooperation with instructors. In order to receive accommodations, you must be registered with Alpha Scholars Program, and you must complete a specific request for each class in which you need accommodations. If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please call the Alpha Scholars Program office directly at 325-674-2667."
- **Office hours:** Please feel free to come to my office to discuss course materials, assignments, or any problems that may arise throughout the semester. If my office hours are not convenient, we can arrange another time to meet. If you need to speak with me when I am not in my office, you can e-mail me anytime or call me at home (676-8785) before 9:00 p.m. Apart from weekends or when I am out of town, I will normally respond to e-mail the same day I receive it.
- The instructor reserves the right to make necessary changes in the syllabus as the semester progresses.