

The Graduate School of Political Management

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

M.P.S. in Strategic Public Relations

Fall 2015

August 31, 2015 – December 14, 2015

Crisis and Issues Management

PSPR 6210

3 Credits

Monday/7:10 p.m. – 9:40 p.m.

Alexandria Graduate Education Center

BASIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Instructor

Bill Meierling, a graduate of the GSPM, has served as a crisis counselor and public relations strategist for clients in the public, private, political and nonprofit sectors. Past clients include the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Walmart Stores, Inc., United Way Worldwide and the American Legislative Exchange Council. Bill's work has been featured in *The Economist*, *Campaigns and Elections Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, C-SPAN and PBS.

Contact Information

Phone Number: (202) 725-5026

Email Address: meierlingw@gmail.com

Communication

Email is the best way to reach me. I will return your email within 24 hours. I am available throughout the semester for scheduled calls and office hours by request.

Blackboard Site

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site throughout the semester, as Blackboard will be the primary venue for outside classroom communications between the instructors and the students. Students can access the course site at <https://blackboard.gwu.edu>. Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or helpdesk.gwu.edu.

Academic Integrity

All members of the university community are expected to exhibit honesty and competence in their academic work. Students have a special responsibility to acquaint themselves with, and make use of, all proper procedures for doing research, writing papers, and taking exams. Members of the community will be presumed to be familiar with the proper academic procedures and will be held responsible for applying them. Deliberate failure to act in accordance with such procedures will be considered academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is defined as "cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information." Acts of academic dishonesty are a legal, moral, and intellectual offense against the community and will be prosecuted through the proper university channels. The University Code of Academic Integrity can be found at <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>.

Support for Students with Disabilities

GW's Disability Support Services (DSS) provides and coordinates accommodations and other services for students with a wide variety of disabilities, as well as those temporarily disabled by injury or illness. Accommodations are available through DSS to facilitate academic access for students with disabilities. Please notify your instructor if you require accommodations. Additional information is available at www.gwu.edu/~dss.

In the Event of an Emergency or Crisis during Class

If we experience some an emergency during class time, we will try to stay at this location until we hear that we can move about safely. If we have to leave here, we will meet at **[fill in proximate location]** in order to account for everyone and to make certain that everyone is safe. Please refer to Campus Advisories for the latest information on the University's operating status: <http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu/>.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance and participation is imperative to your success in this class. As crisis work focuses on high-speed decision-making, your participation in class is invaluable to your coursework and learning. Attendance will be kept and will be reflected in your final grade. However, I understand that life happens. If you must miss class, please make prior arrangements with me.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the semester, students will be given the opportunity to evaluate the course through GW's online course evaluation system. It is very important that you take the time to complete an evaluation. Students are also encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course of the semester by contacting any/all of the following:

Professor Lawrence Parnell
Director, Strategic Public Relations Program
lparnell@gwu.edu | 703-299-4150

Dr. Jack Prostko
Associate Dean for Learning and Faculty Development
College of Professional Studies
jackp@gwu.edu | 202-994-3592

Suzanne Farrand
Director of Academic Administration, GSPM
sfarrand@gwu.edu | 202-994-9309

THE COURSE

Strategic Public Relations Program Objectives

Upon the completion of the Masters in SPR, students will have obtained an enhanced understanding and skills in:

1. Fundamentals of effective, strategic communications;
2. Best practices for writing, media relations and strategic communications planning and implementation;
3. Leadership in communications on a sound ethical and financial basis;
4. Working with management and staff/vendors to develop and manage the implementation of effective communications strategies.

Course Description and Overview

The practice of Issues Management involves the intersection of a number of communications and policy disciplines, including environmental scanning, public policy analysis, public policy advocacy, strategic communications, media relations, grassroots mobilization, coalition management and corporate reputation management. This course will explore all of the approaches in detail and examine ways in which they work together to further the broad strategic goals of organizations.

The course will be conducted as a seminar and will require robust classroom discussion. The goal of the course is to provide students with an in-depth knowledge of the various elements of Issues Management and to equip them with the practical skills needed to shape public opinion and public policy in order to advance organizational goals.

Course Learning Objectives

1. Understand the procedures and techniques involved in the issues management process, including the dynamics of a strategic response.
2. Understand the crisis and issues management life cycle. Be able to assess the scale and trajectory of a crisis situation and offer public relations-related counsel.
3. Develop the ability to conduct traditional and social media scans to sense and identify potential issues, and develop plans to navigate challenging public relations environments.
4. Learn to think strategically when confronted by limited information and time constraints related to crisis situations.
5. Develop a crisis/issue communications plan.

Course Requirements

Students are required to attend and participate in class. Participation in group work and class discussions is imperative to understanding the crisis and issues management framework. By the end of the day before class (Sunday), students are required to submit two questions or observations about the reading in the Blackboard discussion forum. The four assignments for the class build on one-another. The issue and client you select will be the basis for the Case Study and Crisis Plan. Be prepared to invest significant time and effort in understanding the nature of your selected crisis and the desired results of your client.

Evaluation and Grading

Assignment	Learning Objective(s) Addressed	Due Date	Weight
“Crisis Case Study One” In three-pages or less, analyze a crisis or issue of your choosing. Identify the cause, discuss how the crisis was handled and analyze the result. Could the crisis have been handled differently in order to produce a more favorable result?	1, 2, 3, 4	9/28	15%
“Crisis Case Study Two” In three-pages or less, analyze a crisis or issue of your choosing. Identify the cause, discuss how the crisis was handled and analyze the result. Could the crisis have been handled differently in order to produce a more favorable result?	1, 2, 3, 4	10/19	15%
“Client Selection” For your Crisis Plan Final, what crisis or issue will you manage and who is your client? In one page identify the client, provide background information on the individual or organization and illustrate why this client should care about the issue at hand.	1, 2, 3, 4,5	10/26	10%
Crisis Plan and Presentation		12/7-14	35%
Attendance, Participation and Quality	n/a		25%
Total			100%

Following is the grade scale for all GSPM classes:

Grade*	Grading Standard
A 94-100	Your work is outstanding and ready for submission in a professional environment. Your material, effort, research, and writing demonstrate superior work.
A- 90-93	Represents solid work with minor errors. Overall, excellent work.
B+ 87-89	Very good. Represents well-written material, research, and presentation, but needs some minor work.
B 83-86	Satisfactory work, but needs reworking and more effort. Note that although not a failing grade, at the graduate level, anything below a “B” is viewed as unacceptable.
B- 80-82	You’ve completed the assignment, but you are not meeting all of the requirements.
C+ 77-79	Needs improvement in content and in effort. Shows some motivation and concern.
C 73-76	Needs reworking, improved effort, and additional research. Shows minimal motivation and concern.
C- 70-72 (lowest grade to pass)	Poor performance. Major errors, too many misspellings, problems with accuracy, etc.
F Below 70	Unacceptable performance, or inability to submit the assignment.

*Please note that you may be penalized for poor grammar and late submission of assignment(s).

Required Text and Learning Materials

[*Glass Jaw: A Manifesto for Defending Fragile Reputations in an Age of Instant Scandal*](#)

ISBN: 978-1455582976

[*Harvard Business Review on Crisis Management*](#)

ISBN: 978-1578512355

[*Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable*](#), Fink

ISBN: 978-0595090792

Suggested Reading

[*Thinking Strategically: The Competitive Edge in Business, Politics and Everyday Life*](#), Dixit and Nalebuff

ISBN: 978-0393310351

[*The PR Crisis Bible*](#), Cohn

ISBN: 978-1419681691

Additional readings distributed in class

Tentative Course Calendar*

*The instructor reserves the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar.

August 31, 2015

Week 1

Topic and Content Covered: An introduction to crisis and issues management from a public relations and engagement perspective. Course outline, guest speakers, syllabus and course work will be discussed. Mid-term and final projects discussed/explained.

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Due Today: n/a

September 7, 2015

Labor Day – No Class – Work on Case Study One

September 14, 2015

Week 2

Topic and Content Covered: The anatomy of an issue or crisis and the corresponding issue management or crisis response campaign. How to think about and analyze a crisis

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 2, 4

Reading Due Today:

Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable, Ch. 3, 7

HBR on Crisis Management, Ch. 4 – Right Away and All at Once

HBR on Crisis Management, Ch. 7 – Leadership When There is No One to Ask

September 21, 2015 (Location: MPA 309; 805 21st Street, NW; Foggy Bottom Campus)

Week 3

Guest Speaker: Eric Dezenhall, CEO Dezenhall Resources, Author of *Glass Jaw*

Topic and Content Covered: In an age when crisis and scandal can destroy a company's brand or anyone's reputation in an instant, David is the new Goliath. In the digital age, the fundamental nature of controversy is viral, rendering once-mighty organizations powerless against scandal.

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 2, 4

Due Today: *Glass Jaw: A Manifesto for Defending Fragile Reputations in an Age of Instant Scandal*

September 28, 2015

Week 4

Guest Speaker: Dave Dziok, Communications Director, Koch Industries, Inc.

Topic and Content Covered: Koch Industries and Walmart case studies. Managing issues, brand protection and development. Communications considerations in challenging times. Audience identification and program development.

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 4, 5

Due Today:

HBR on Crisis Management, Ch. 1

“Crisis Case Study One” In three-pages or less, analyze a crisis or issue of your choosing. Identify the cause, discuss how the crisis was handled and analyze the result. Could the crisis have been handled differently in order to produce a more favorable result?

October 5, 2015

Week 5

Topic and Content Covered: ALEC 2012-2014 case study. What not to do (and what to do) in a crisis.

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 3, 4, 5

October 12, 2015

Columbus Day – No Class – Work on Case Study Two

October 19, 2015

Week 6

Guest Speaker: Lisa B. Nelson, Former Global Government Relations Head, VISA

Topic and Content Covered: VISA interchange case study. Managing legislative issues—when the crisis or issues management campaign can be forecast, but victory is required for your business.

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Due Today:

“Crisis Case Study Two” In three-pages or less, analyze a crisis or issue of your choosing. Identify the cause, discuss how the crisis was handled and analyze the result. Could the crisis have been handled differently in order to produce a more favorable result?

October 26, 2015

Week 7

Topic and Content Covered: Elements of a crisis or issues management plan. Organizational dynamics and identifying the team.

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Due Today:

“Client Selection” For your Crisis Plan Final, what crisis or issue will you manage and who is your client? In **one page** identify the client, provide background information on the individual or organization and illustrate why this client should care about the issue at hand.

November 2, 2015

Week 8

Topic and Content Covered: Managing message in issue and crisis campaigns.

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

November 9, 2015

Week 9

Topic and Content Covered: Managing media in issue and crisis campaigns.

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

November 16, 2015

Week 10

Topic and Content Covered: Case studies in issue and crisis management – in class team project

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Reading Due Today: *Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable*, Ch. 13-14

November 23, 2015

Week 11

Topic and Content Covered: Open Forum on crisis and issue management. Question and answer session related to final projects/presentations

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

November 30, 2015

Week 12 — Study Day – Work on Final Project

December 7, 2015

Week 13

Topic and Content Covered: Final Presentations

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 5

Assignment(s) Due Today: Final Projects

December 14, 2015

Week 14

Topic and Content Covered: Final Presentations

Learning Objective(s) Addressed: 5

Assignment(s) Due Today: Final Projects

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Unless explicitly allowed by the instructor, course materials, class discussions, and examinations are created for and expected to be used by class participants only. The recording and rebroadcasting of such material, by any means, is forbidden.