

WHCP 6120: Advanced Persuasion: Crisis Communication Spring 2023

Course Objectives: In this course, we will explore the elements of effective communication in business crisis scenarios. Through a combination of real-world and simulated case studies, students will learn and practice techniques for communicating successfully in high-stakes settings. **The major communication skills** covered in the course include:

- **Persuasive Frameworks and Techniques:** Building on concepts from our foundational speaking course, WHCP 6110, students will learn advanced techniques for communicating during a crisis, including how to shape a cohesive narrative and support your organization's message through talking points.
- **Delivering Under Pressure:** Students will participate in a simulated media interview in which they deliver a prepared statement and address challenging questions. Students will apply frameworks used by professional media trainers and receive individualized coaching.
- **Impromptu Speaking:** Students will learn to be more effective in responding in the moment, particularly when dealing with difficult questions in a business crisis.

The major components of this course include:

Class 1: Crisis Frameworks
Class 2: Preparing a Crisis Communication Response
Class 3: Communication Strategy in a Crisis
Class 4: Navigating Media Interviews
Class 5 & 6: Communicating the Path Forward

Please note the following about the assignments:

- All graded assignments are included in the course syllabus.
- Final details for all assignments are on Canvas.
- **You must complete all graded assignments** in order to pass the course, and do so **on time** to receive full credit.
- All assignments, including presentations, submitted more than 1 week late will receive zero points.
- Class participation will be graded on attendance, class contributions (including discussion board contributions, providing meaningful feedback in class, and being an attentive audience member), and timely completion of ungraded assignments.
- Attendance at each session is very important. Any unexcused absence will have a negative impact on your grade. Note: a student with more than 2 absences (for any reason) cannot pass the course.
- Students are responsible for compliance with the [Ethics Matrix](#).
- Instructors and students agree to hold each other accountable to the standards set forth in the [Wharton Learning Agreement](#).
-

Course Outline:

Class	Content/Focus	Deliverables/Exercises	Points Assigned
1	Crisis Frameworks	In-class exercise: Impromptu crisis response	-
2	Preparing a Crisis Communication Response	Due one day before class: Talking points	5
3	Communication Strategy in a Crisis	4-min response strategy presentation	20
4	Navigating Media Interviews	Opening statement for media training & simulated press conference (90 second statement with Q&A)	15
5 & 6	Communicating the Path Forward	Due two days before class 5: Discussion board exercise	-
		5-min crisis resolution presentation with Q&A	30
ALL	Providing meaningful feedback, participating in-class, and being an attentive audience member	Class participation	30
		Total Points	100

Role of the TA (Wharton Communication Fellow): We have a group of highly qualified TAs (Wharton Communication Fellows) who are here to give you additional assistance with your presentation preparation and delivery. They are second-year MBA students who were selected based on their effectiveness in offering feedback during their own core experience. Wharton Communication Fellows are committed to helping you develop strong speaking skills.

Absences & Make-up Work: Attendance is expected at every class. If you need to miss class, inform your instructor and review/complete the corresponding make-up module on Canvas.

Required Reading: All required readings can be accessed from the Canvas site. On the left side of the page, you'll find the Study.Net Materials link. Use that link to access all required readings unless otherwise noted in Canvas.

Electronics & Note-taking Policy: All students are expected to be fully engaged with the instructor, class content, and one another throughout the entirety of the class session. Use of mobile or electronic devices without instructor permission may result in the deduction of participation points.

Classroom Mask Policy: Per University policy, masks may be required in the classroom based on instructor prerogative. Your instructor will communicate their classroom mask policy prior to the first day of class via an email and Canvas announcement.

Course Overview

Full assignment details and due dates are posted on Canvas

Class 1: Crisis Frameworks

- Learning Goals
 - Explore how principles learned in WHCP 6110 apply to crisis communication
 - Discuss frameworks for effective crisis communication
 - Demonstrate application of governing concepts for crisis communication including speaking under pressure framework and crisis identification
- Assignments
 - Read:
 - The course syllabus & “Understanding Grades and Feedback”
 - NPR Timeline: A History of GM Ignition Switch Crisis
 - Garcia, Helio Fred, “The Power of Framing: GM’s Cobalt and the Failure to Understand”

Class 2: Preparing a Crisis Communication Response

- Learning Goals
 - Discuss audience analysis frameworks to use when preparing a crisis response
 - Demonstrate use of talking points to clarify message and narrative
 - Differentiate responding in crisis from simple Q&A
- Assignments
 - Read:
 - Sucher, S. and Gupta, S., “The Elements of a Good Company Apology”
 - Fink, S., “Understanding Your Crisis”
 - Eblin, S., “Three Best Practices for Creating Effective Talking Points”
 - Prepare & Submit:
 - Draft five talking points you will use to support your organization’s response to your assigned crisis case. Upload your talking points to Canvas one day before class 2.

Class 3: Communication Strategy in a Crisis

- Learning Goals
 - Demonstrate ability to organize/lead an ethical and cohesive crisis communication response
 - Identify and communicate a coherent narrative and key message
 - Identify preparation requirements for media interviews including opening statement
- Assignments
 - Read:
 - Einwillera, S. A., and Lauferb, C. R., “Believe me, I am one of you! The role of common group affiliation in crisis communication”
 - Prepare & Deliver:
 - Prepare and deliver your 4-minute crisis communication strategy presentation

Class 4: Navigating Media Interviews (Guest Presentation/Exercise by Professional Media Trainer)

- Learning Goals
 - Apply techniques for staying on message amidst challenging/hostile Q&A
 - Demonstrate ability to respond ethically during media questioning
 - Enhance ability to detect and respond to risks while fielding hostile questions
- Assignments
 - Read:
 - “How to Prepare an Opening Statement”
 - Ulmer, R., et al., *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving From Crisis to Opportunity*, Sage Publications, Inc. 2011, Chapter 3 “Lessons on Effective Crisis Communication,” pp 41- 62.
 - Watch
 - Media Interview Module
 - Upload:
 - Upload your revised talking points based on feedback from the class.
 - Prepare & Deliver:
 - Prepare a 90-second opening statement for your press conference on your assigned crisis. This session will be conducted by professional media trainers who will give specific instructions for the simulated media interview in class.

Class 5 & 6: Communicating the New Normal

- Learning Goals
 - Synthesize crisis frameworks toward an effective presentation that cohesively describes the organization’s crisis response
- Assignments
 - Read:
 - Sellnow, T. L. and Seeger, M., *Theorizing Crisis Communication*, Wiley- Blackwell, 2013, “Theories of Communication and Crisis Outcomes” Chapter 4, pp. 76-104.
 - Post:
 - A reply to the Media Training Debrief discussion board topic at least two days prior to class 5.
 - Prepare & Deliver:
 - Prepare a 5-minute Crisis Resolution presentation with 3 minutes of Q&A.