

Spring 2024

COM 325-102: Crisis Communication

Matthew Golden

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Course: Com 325 - Crisis Communications

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Course Description

This course offers students with an interest in organizational communications or public relations the opportunity to gain insight into the practice of crisis communications. The primary goal of this course is to expose students to the realities and demands associated with managing organizational communications across a range of crisis situations. The course will review case studies, best practices in the field, methods, and call upon students to execute the strategies learned during simulated crisis events. Students also will cultivate habits of effective and ethical conduct under trying circumstances.

Class Location, Day, and Time

Central King Building 206, Tuesday evenings at 6 pm until 8:50 pm

Prerequisites

ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and one History and Humanities GER 200 level course with a grade of C or higher. This course satisfies the three credit 300 GER in History and Humanities.

About the Instructor

Dr. Matthew Golden is the vice president for communications and marketing at New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT). His responsibilities include the planning and execution of internal and external communications initiatives. He serves as the college's primary spokesperson, guides media relations, and oversees strategic, executive, and crisis communications. Dr. Golden has managed communications related to crises of varying scale, including violent crimes such as shootings and robberies, personnel and legal matters, major fiscal challenges, student deaths, political and institutional policy decisions, weather emergencies, as well as other issues, several of which received regional, national, and even international attention. He earned a bachelor's degree from Princeton University, a master's degree from

Rutgers University, and a doctoral degree at The George Washington University.

Office Hours

Flexible, by appointment throughout each week.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify available methods and technologies used to conduct crisis communications as well as their strengths and weaknesses;
- Appreciate the unique challenges associated with conducting crisis communications during various types of events, including violent crimes, ethics scandals, facilities failures, weather emergencies, and financial challenges;
- Collect, analyze, and interpret information and communicate it to key audiences effectively and ethically through a number of mediums;
- Assess the needs of different audiences and situations;
- Use technologies appropriate to meet the needs of particular audiences;
- Identify key messages and communicate them with clarity, consistency, and accuracy;
- Work collaboratively and efficiently in pressurized situations;
- Assess and respond to both short- and long-term organizational communication needs related to a crisis situation;
- Effectively represent an organization to external constituencies, including the media;
- Develop a complete crisis communications plan appropriate for the needs of a specific organization.

Required Readings

- Listed below with links corresponding to each week of class

Attendance

- Attend all classes, unless extraordinary circumstances arise, in which case alternative arrangements must be made well in advance of that class.
- In exceptional circumstances, such as illness or emergency, please contact me immediately.

- Failure to attend class without prior notification will negatively affect participation grades.
- Arrive on time.

Academic Integrity

- Academic integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working to earn. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: [NJIT Academic Integrity Code](#).
- It is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

Accommodations

- If you are in need of an accommodation due to a disability, please contact the [Office of Accessibility Resources and Services](#), to discuss your specific needs or to request a Letter of Accommodation Eligibility.

Student Assessment

- Class participation and related assignments - 20%
 - Participation in class discussion and completion of assignments related to class discussion will be a vital component of this course.
 - Arrive prepared to engage in discussion and activities.
 - Expect to disagree with some of the things said over the course of the semester, but commit yourself to treating your peers (and, by extension, me) with respect and dignity.
 - While in class, focus your minds and energies on the tasks at hand.
- Theory application presentation - 10%

- Students will identify a recent, high profile organizational crisis and present to the class a summary of the crisis and an explanation of how one of the theories discussed in class applies or could apply to the case.
- Crisis Communications Plan Project - 15%
 - Students will select an organization for which they will develop a complete crisis communications plan. The plan should include a brief description of the organization and its mission; a list of its key constituencies; a threat assessment; an assessment of available communication technologies, resources, and staffing; and operational guidelines, among other components.
 - Students will be required to present their plan to the class, explain how the proposed crisis communication plan will meet the needs of the organization, and field questions.
- Press Conference Project - 15%
 - Students will fulfill the role of primary spokesperson for an assigned organization.
 - Prior to a designated class session those students and the remainder of the class will be given a hypothetical crisis situation and an accompanying fact sheet.
 - The presenting students must prepare initial statements and talking points that will be submitted and used by them during a mock press conference conducted during class.
 - The remainder of the students in class will prepare questions and serve as the press corp.
- Case Study Presentation - 20%
 - Students will prepare a presentation regarding a current or recent organizational crisis that is not scheduled to be covered during this class. The subject must be pre-approved by the instructor.
 - The presentation should explain the crisis event and discuss the crisis communications activities of the organization.
 - The presentation also should analyze the crisis communications efforts in terms of crisis communication theory, methods, ethics, and overall effectiveness.
- Case Study Analysis Paper - 20%
 - Students will complete a case study analysis paper that will analyze the crisis communications activities undertaken

within an assigned case study and analyze them in terms of crisis communication theory, methods, ethics, and overall effectiveness.

- Grading
 - Evaluation will follow the university's grading scale: A = 100-90; B+ = 89-87; B = 86-80; C+ = 79-77 ; C = 76-70; D = 69-60; F = 59-0
 - Work submitted beyond its due date without prior approval of an extension will be reduced by 10 points per day.

Course Schedule

- Section 1 - Crisis Communication and Reputational Management Theory and Research
 - January 16 - Course overview and intro to crisis communications
 - [Psychology of a Crisis](#)
 - [Crisis Strategies](#)
 - [Centrality of Trust](#)
 - [Crisis and Risk Communications](#)
 - January 23 - Theory overview
 - [Cognitive Dissonance Theory](#)
 - [Coombs reading](#)
 - [Situational Crisis Theory](#)
 - [Information vs. Compassion](#)
 - [Risk Communications](#)
 - [Risk and Crisis Communication in Practice](#)
 - [Charisma and Crisis](#)
 - January 30 - Student theory application presentations
- Section 2 - National Incident Management System
 - February 6 - Finish student theory application presentations; NIMS and the Role of the PIO
 - [National Incident Management System \(read pages 50-60\)](#)
 - [Basic Guide for Public Information Officers \(read all\)](#)
- Section 3 - Building the Crisis Communications Plan
 - February 13
 - [Eye of the Storm](#)
 - [Crisis Comms Strategy](#)
 - [Preparing for the Worst](#)

- [Crisis Communications Plans](#)
 - [Messages and Audiences](#)
- February 20 - Overview of the current communication channel and tool landscape
 - [Communication Channels](#)
 - [Online Reputation Management](#)
 - [Leveraging Generative AI](#)
- February 27 - Crisis communications plan presentations
- Section 4 - Working with the Media
 - March 5 - Working with the Media
 - [Working with the Media](#)
 - [Spokesperson overview](#)
 - [Media Law](#)
 - March 19 - Press conference project in class
 - March 26 - Press conference project in class
- Section 5 - Case Study Analysis ([multiple types](#) - violent crime, organizational negligence, natural disaster, etc.)
 - April 2 - Case study discussions
 - Active Shooter - Va Tech from the university's perspective
 - [Article 1](#)
 - [Article 2](#)
 - Damar Hamlin from the NFL's perspective
 - [Article 1](#)
 - [Article 2](#)
 - [Article 3](#)
 - [Article 4](#)
 - Hurricane Katrina from a governmental perspective
 - [Article 1](#)
 - April 9 - Case study discussions
 - Deepwater Horizon from British Petroleum's perspective
 - [Article 1](#)
 - [Article 2](#)
 - [Article 3](#)
 - COVID 19 from a university perspective
 - [Article 1](#)
 - [Article 2](#)
 - [Article 3](#)

- [Article 4](#)

- April 16 - Case analysis presentations
- April 23 - Case analysis presentations
- April 30 - Peer review of draft case analysis papers
- May 7 - Case Study Analysis Paper Due