

**TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**College of Liberal Arts / Department of Communications**  
**COMM 4255, Crisis Communication**  
**COURSE SYLLABUS – Fall 2019**

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**Class Time:** MW 3:55 p.m. – 5:20 p.m.      **Class Location:** Performing Arts Center 285

**Contacting your professor:** I have an open-door policy. You are invited to stop by anytime during my posted office hours or whenever my door is open for a brief meeting, but an appointment is both preferred and recommended, especially if you request more than just a few minutes of my time. If you send me an e-mail, leave me a note, or a voicemail, please include the following information in any message: (1) A proper greeting, “Hello Dr. Jeffress...” (2) proper identification, “This is FirstName LastName in your Crisis Comm course”, (3) your phone number and best time to reach you (if a voicemail), and (4) a brief explanation of your request. I will not reply to e-mails that do not include items 1 and 2 above. Before you contact me with a question, please reference the syllabus and eLearn. I am not obligated to reply to messages on weekends or after normal business hours. Please do not allow yourself to become overwhelmed. I am here to help you. I genuinely want you to enjoy this class and succeed in it. However, it is unrealistic for you to e-mail me late in the evening, on weekends, or within a narrow window of time before an assignment is due and expect me to reply in short order.

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS & READINGS:**

- CERT. (2012). *CERT Emergency Communications Participant Manual*. Download at:  
[https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1449695072653-f9e63377160573cd3050158874dc548c/cert\\_emergencycommunications\\_pm\\_100615.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1449695072653-f9e63377160573cd3050158874dc548c/cert_emergencycommunications_pm_100615.pdf)
- Seeger, M. W. (2006). Best practices in crisis communication: An expert panel process. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34(3), 232-244. doi: 10.1080/00909880600769944 (PDF will be made available).
- St. John, B., III, & Pearson, Y.E. (2017). *Crisis Communication & Crisis Management: An Ethical Approach*. Los Angeles: Sage. ISBN: 978-1-4833-1614-7.
- Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T.L., & Seeger, M.W. (2019). *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity*, 4th ed. Los Angeles: Sage. ISBN: 978-1-5063-1573-7.

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

As communication technology and the proliferation of news outlets instantly informs the public about organizational missteps. Organizations need to be aware of their reputation before, during, and after crises. This course examines what constitutes and causes organizational crises, what to do when a crisis hits, and how to learn from crises and prevent them in future. This course is part of the core curriculum for the Communication Studies program major, the learning objectives of which are:

LO-01: Specialized knowledge and skills: Students should have knowledge of the history and specializations of Communication Studies as an academic field.

LO-02: Communicate effectively: Students will demonstrate an ability to accomplish communicative goals in oral, written, and/or multi-media forms.

LO-03: Apply communication theories and perspectives to critical inquiry: Students should employ communication theories and perspectives to engage in critical inquiry.

LO-04: Commitment to cultural sensitivity: Students should exemplify a commitment to embrace cultural differences and demonstrate responsibility of cultural sensitivity.

LO-05: Commitment to civic engagement: Students should explain the importance of communication in civic life and advocate a course of action to address community issues.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES.** Upon successful completion of this course students should be able to:

1. Explain the three basic stages of crisis management, and the communication actions associated with each stage. (LO-01, LO-03)
2. Explain how communication can prevent, cause, exacerbate, and assist in the recovery from a crisis (LO-01, LO-03)
3. Summarize the role(s) of stakeholders, including the influences of audience diversity and vulnerable populations (LO-04, LO-05)
4. Evaluate responses to past crises through case study analysis (LO-01, LO-03).
5. Summarize the crisis planning process. (LO-01)
6. Create a crisis plan for an organization. (LO-02)

**COURSE METHODOLOGY.** Class will meet twice weekly and include lectures, class presentations and discussions, and student-led presentations and discussions. Two examinations (a mid-term and a final exam) will be given based on lectures, class discussion and presentations, and assigned readings. Students will also complete individual and group assignments. Lectures may involve traditional lecturing, PowerPoint and/or other multimedia presentations, videos, and guest lectures.

#### **COURSE POLICIES**

1. Attendance. Students are required to attend all classes and project meetings, and complete all readings and assignments.

A. Unexcused absences. According to campus policy, all students are required to attend classes regularly and punctually. Students are allowed unexcused absences equal to one week's classes: MW classes two (3) TR classes two (2) and for a single class one (1) during the regular semester. However, a 5% final grade penalty (50 points) will be assessed for each unexcused absence in this course. Any student who has four (4) unexcused absences will automatically **fail the course**. No missed assignments, quizzes or exams due to an unexcused absence can be made-up and a zero will be entered as the grade.

B. Tardiness. Classes will begin and end on time and roll will be taken. Anyone arriving after roll call will be marked tardy. Anyone leaving class after less than 30 minutes will be marked absent. Anyone leaving class after 30 minutes will be marked tardy. Two tardies equal one unexcused absence.

C. Excused absences. Life happens. Your instructor understands this. However, students must understand that there are many unethical students who try to take advantage of an instructor's empathy. Therefore, any excused absence must be approved at least 48 hours in

advance (except for legitimate emergencies, of course) and be verified with appropriate and sufficient documentation. Any student who attempts to submit fake excused absence documentation will automatically **fail the course**.

D. Understand that even excused absences have consequences and can make it difficult for a student to pass a course. It is the student's responsibility to make up any work missed during an excused absence and to complete any extra assignment that the instructor may require for the student's absence from class participation. Any make-up work from an excused absence is penalized at 5% per day late. No make-up work for an excused absence will be accepted past one week from the original due date.

The following is a list of common circumstances that are **NOT** excused:

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|------------------------|---|
| (1). Traffic           | (6). Schedule conflicts with other courses                            |
| (2). Babysitting       | (7). Routine medical/dental appointments                              |
| (3). Job Interviews    | (8). Campus meetings (clubs, advisors, etc.)                          |
| (4). Job work schedule | (9). Picking up family/friends<br>from the airport (or anywhere else) |

2. You will get out of this class what you choose to take from it. I strive to be fair, impartial, respectful, and understanding toward every student. I will give my best effort to you as an instructor and provide you with every opportunity to succeed in this course. In return, I expect your best effort as a student and will encourage you to that end. If you want to know about my philosophy of education, then please read my "Useless Degrees" blog on my Web site. You must be disciplined and put in the time and effort to succeed. As the old saying goes, "By the inch, it's a cinch; by the yard, it's hard."
3. R-E-S-P-E-C-T. This course encourages free and critical thinking with minimal censorship of topics. I desire to facilitate an open and safe learning environment. Everyone should feel welcomed to share his/her views and questions without fear of belittlement. We represent different races, ethnicities, ages, religious views, political persuasions, sexual orientations, levels of mental and physical ability, etc. Under no circumstances will disrespect be tolerated. Any student who exhibits disrespectful behavior toward the instructor or any other member of class may be asked to leave or even be dropped from the course. At the same time, may we all realize that just because people disagree with our point of view does not mean they are personally attacking us. Let us talk about issues that matter and stretch ourselves to listen, think critically, and discuss them respectfully.
4. Food and drinks. Students may have drinks in containers with lids in class, but just be respectful about it (no ice crunching, slurping, etc.). Eating during class is distracting to the rest of the class and is, therefore, prohibited. If you need to bring in some food to eat before roll is called, then that is fine, but once class begins all food items should be out of sight. If you have a medical condition that may necessitate you eating a snack at some point during class, just let me know and that will not be a problem.
5. Roll is taken and attendance is recorded at the beginning of every class.
6. It is your responsibility to attend class and to complete all required reading and assignments prior to attending class in order to be prepared for class and contribute to it. Students will be required to complete a reading statement at the beginning of each class to affirm whether they completed the assigned readings. Pop quizzes based on readings and/or prior lectures are always a possibility. If you miss a class meeting for any reason, you will be held responsible for all material covered and announcements made in your absence. You are responsible for

contacting a fellow classmate to get copies of notes. You are accountable to the attendance policy listed above.

7. All electronic devices (including cell phones, smart watches, iPods/Mp3 players, laptops, iPads, e-Readers, Bluetooth devices, headphones, etc.) must be silenced and stowed out of sight during class. All purses, book bags, jackets, etc. must be stowed under the desk. Students are not allowed to have any of these items in their laps or on top of the desk. Any student who has to be asked to silence or put away an electronic device after roll has been called may have his/her electronic device confiscated for the remainder of class and will receive a penalty of 10 points in the grade book. Students who violate this policy 3 times may be dropped from the course.
8. Class will start and end on time. You deserve to get your money's worth. Therefore, shortchanging yourself and others by engaging in disruptive behaviors such as leaving class early, falling asleep or resting head on desk, packing up books and supplies near the end of class, etc. is unacceptable. Such interruptions/disturbances of class may result in disciplinary action and even being dropped from the class.

**FINAL GRADES.** Final grades are calculated based on total points possible in the following categories:

Class Participation	100 points
Case Study presentation*	100 points
Reading statements	100 points
Misc. assignments, pop quizzes	100 points
Midterm	100 points
Final Exam	200 points
<u>Group crisis response project*</u>	<u>300 points</u>
Total Possible:	1000 points

Final grades scale: 900-1000 = A; 800-899 = B; 700-799 = C; 600-699 = D; 0-599 = F

\*Detailed assignment instructions will be provided in separate handouts.

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY.** Cheating and/or plagiarism (including copying someone else's work, using "cheat sheet", quoting without citation, turning in papers for other class without the professor's approval) will result in zero points and be reported to the school. You must do your own work; grading is on the basis of the work *you* do. While I do encourage students to help each other by coaching and critiquing speeches, you must not share actual work. If I find that you have plagiarized work, in part or in whole, from another student or from outside of class, or you have assisted another student in plagiarism, your grade for that assignment will be a zero. If I find that you have shared work — i.e., accessory of plagiarism — your grade for that assignment will be zero. Legitimately quoted work must be properly marked and attributed. Information and ideas taken from other sources must be attributed, even if they are not direct quotations. If I find that you have copied on a test, or shared answers (giving or receiving), your grade on that test will be zero. No make-ups are allowed on tests or assignments which are in violation of the standards of academic integrity. Any plagiarism, cheating, or other violations of academic integrity, as spelled out in your *TSU Student Handbook*, will earn a grade of zero for that assignment. Two such violations in the semester will

result in a grade of F for the semester. Below are some of the guidelines that may help students avoid accidental plagiarism or cheating:

1. Give citation whenever you paraphrase or summarize other people's ideas or words.
2. Quote whenever you use exact words from other people's text.
3. Don't use notes or study aids in quizzes or exams unless the instructor has other arrangements.
4. Don't fabricate information and data in your writing or report.
5. Don't use or circulate previously given exam materials.
6. Don't submit the same paper to more than one class without obtaining prior permission from the class instructor

**DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION STATEMENT.** TSU is committed to creating inclusive learning environments and providing all students with opportunities to learn and excel in their course of study. Any student with a disability or condition which might interfere with his/her class performance or attendance may arrange for reasonable accommodations by visiting the Office of Disability Services (ODS). ODS is located in Kean Hall, room 131 and can be reached at 963-7400 or [www.tnstate.edu/disabilityservices](http://www.tnstate.edu/disabilityservices) . You will be required to speak with ODS staff and provide documentation of the need for an accommodation. If you qualify for an accommodation, then ODS will notify your instructor directly. The instructor may then request a meeting with you to discuss matters. Students are, of course, to initiate a meeting with the instructor at any time. Accommodations will only be provided after the instructor receives the accommodation letter from ODS; accommodations are not retroactive. You must follow this process for each semester that you require accommodations.

**SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, DOMESTIC/DATING VIOLENCE, STALKING.** TSU recognizes the importance of providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or is experiencing any of these incidents, there are resources to assist you in the areas of accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and making referrals for assistance with legal protective orders and more.

Please be aware that most TSU employees, including faculty and instructors, are "responsible employees", meaning that they are required to report incidents of sexual violence, domestic/dating violence or stalking. **This means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must report the information to the Title IX Coordinator.** Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your situation will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

You are encouraged to contact TSU's Title IX Coordinator to report any incidents of sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic/dating violence or stalking. The Title IX coordinator is located in the Office of Equity and Inclusion, McWherter Administration Building, Ste. 260 and can be reached at 963-7494 or 963-7438. For more information about Title IX and TSU's SART or policies and procedures regarding sexual, domestic/dating violence and stalking please visit: [www.tnstate.edu/equity](http://www.tnstate.edu/equity).

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, who is not required to report, you can contact the TSU Counseling Center, located in the basement of Wilson Hall, at 963-5611 or TSU Student Health Services, located in the Floyd Payne Campus Center room 304, at 963-5084. You may also contact the following off campus resources: Sexual Assault Center of Nashville at 1-800-879-1999 or [www.sacenter.org](http://www.sacenter.org) or the Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence at 615-386-9406 or [www.tncoalition.org](http://www.tncoalition.org) .

**HARASSMENT & DISCRIMINATION.** Tennessee State University is firmly committed to compliance with all federal, state and local laws that prohibit harassment and discrimination based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, disability, religion, retaliation, veteran status and other protected categories. TSU will not subject any student to discrimination or harassment and no student shall be excluded from participation in nor denied the benefits of any educational program based on their protected class. If a student believes they have been discriminated against or harassed because of a protected class, they are encouraged to contact the Office of Equity and Inclusion at McWherter Administration Building, Ste. 260, 615-963-7494 or 963-7438, [www.tnstate.edu/equity](http://www.tnstate.edu/equity).

**IMPORTANT NOTE/DISCLAIMER:** This syllabus may be modified at any point in the semester based on the instructor's evaluation of the class needs.