

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS A PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE UNTIL SEPT 10, 2019. THE MOST RECENT SYLLABUS IS ON THE COURSE'S MOODLE WEBSITE. PLEASE CONTACT THE COURSE DIRECTOR AT [jons@yorku.ca](mailto:jons@yorku.ca) IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.**

**AP/WRITING 3010M 3.00**

**PRACTICAL STUDIES IN DAMAGE CONTROL**

**Course Director: Jon Sufrin, Ph.D.**

S358 Ross

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:30-2:30, Wed 2:30, Thurs. 12:30, and by appointment

**Course Website: <https://moodle.yorku.ca/>**

**SEMINAR TIMES AND LOCATIONS:**

**Seminar:**

**T 2:30-5:30**

**VH 1005**

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Practical Studies in Damage Control examines the growing body of research on public relations theory relating to crisis communication. Crises are significant threats to organizations and individuals but strategies exist to prepare for them and to minimize damage. WRIT 3010 considers each stage of crisis communication but puts particular emphasis on the response stage in legacy and digital media. The course makes frequent use of case studies and explores current prescriptive theory, but emphasizes flexible strategies, and engages with the use of multiple kinds of media to get the message out.

It's important to remember that this is not a class in ethical behavior, but for considering and practicing techniques that will mitigate damage to the reputations of an individual or organization. The question to be considered is not if a given party ought to have done the thing, but instead how they can shape a reply to the charges against them.

### Course Learning Objectives:

The specific learning objectives of the course are that students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an ability to apply current theories in crisis communication to old and new damage control contexts, particularly in the field of public relations.
- Apply each of the three main Damage Control clusters and demonstrate a facility with the related discourse.
- Analyze the nature of the specific crisis at hand and recommend a response in writing, using both digital and/or legacy media, as applicable.
- Compose a professional press release with attention to audience, client context and crisis communication strategies.
- Critically evaluate how existing power structures—particularly those represented by economics, gender and government—affect the response of stakeholders.
- Show improvement in control of technical elements of writing, including grammar, tone, audience awareness and stylistic requirements.

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## COURSE STRUCTURE

**Seminars** will be held on Tuesdays, 2:30-5:20, in VH 1005. In seminar, we'll define key terms, discuss the week's podcast and critical ideas, and review relevant case studies. In each week, expect to discuss current events in light of the theories and case studies reviewed to date. In addition to the formal readings, you'll want to pay attention for contexts each week where we can apply course concepts.

## Course Assessment Breakdown

1. Participation	20% Every week
2. Podcast	15% Your choice
3. Reading Analysis (3)	30% Your choice (3 different weeks)
4. Class Debate	15% December 2
5. Take Home Exam	20% December 12

**The last day to drop WRIT 3010 without receiving a grade is November 8.**

## Global Assignment Instructions

Written assignments should be composed using 12pt Times New Roman font, one inch/2.54 cm margins, be stapled or clipped together, and have page numbers.

All written material for this course may be composed in your own voice. If you wish to compose in academic style, by all means. Please continue to follow the general guidelines of English grammar no matter what style you adopt. The course director is able to handle a reasonable expression of irony, should the situation call for it.

All assignments should be submitted using MLA or Chicago-style citation (footnotes). While MLA is standard for most Humanities style courses (i.e. English, Communication and Culture), footnotes (Chicago) are a superior citation style if you intend to annotate your own text with additional commentary.<sup>1</sup> Please do not use Endnotes.

## Assignment Descriptions

**Participation (20%)** – Do the readings every week and listen to the readings discussion podcast by the weekly groups (on Moodle). Come to class having thought about the podcast questions and be prepared to discuss them in seminar, as well as answer podcast questions. If you led the podcast, you should be in class to help guide the ensuing discussion.

Class Participation is graded on a four point scale:

- 1 point for being present
- 1 point for contributing anything to the discussion
- 1 point for contributing substantively to the discussion
- 1 point for outstanding contributions to the discussion/seminar/podcast etc. that week.

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<sup>1</sup> Why would you want to do that? Perhaps you've thought of something interesting to say in addition but don't want to interrupt your discussion with a tangent. Maybe there is something to elaborate on (like I am doing now) that would only disrupt your prose. If this is the case, it is better to put your annotation at the bottom of the same page it references, so your audience does not have to leaf back and forth through the text. Be reasonable with your annotations. They aren't part of your official word count.

Note that you may log in to Moodle to comment on the podcast to gain at least one point, whether or not you were present in seminar. Four points is the maximum you can earn towards participation in a given week. Online-only commenting cannot earn more than two points a week.

**In re: Online Commenting**, you may choose to respond to your classmates' podcasts and posts or to the readings. Each week's discussion forum will close at 7pm on the Monday night following the relevant seminar (i.e. Week 2 (Sept 17) online participation ends on Sept 24, 7PM, Week 3 (Sept 25) on Oct 1, 7PM etc).

**Readings Analysis (3x10%)** – Write 3 reading analyses during the term. For each one, write approximately one page per reading (i.e. 2 or 3 pages total), double-spaced. Compare and contrast the readings for that week – and identify important ideas from the texts. What can we learn from these readings that would help us in a practical sense as PR professionals? Is there a common theme between the three? Course concepts that apply?

Use MLA or Chicago citation, and include evidence from the readings. You may hyperlink to outside elements in either your footnotes (if applicable) or in-text. The analyses will be assessed based on the paper's depth of analysis, its use and exploration of evidence, and its demonstration of good grammar and proper paragraphing.

Reading responses assignments are to be submitted on Moodle **by the beginning of class**. A readings analysis cannot be submitted late: the Moodle portal closes promptly at 2:30PM each week. You choose the three weeks, so if you can't get it done one week, choose another week. If you don't have three completed by **November 19** then you will receive a zero for the commensurate fraction of the grade.

**Podcast: Readings Discussion (15%)** – Each week two students will discuss for 15 minutes (+/- 1 minute) the week's assigned readings. A schedule will be posted on Moodle ASAP. Eligible weeks from the syllabus are features with an asterisk (\*).

- ✓ In your podcast, do not summarize or recap the readings – assume we've all read them (each member of the group should know each assigned reading well and feel comfortable discussing all of them). In preparation, you could brainstorm points to talk about. What's interesting about these readings as a whole? What themes come across all the readings? What differences? Links to other weeks?
- ✓ Conclude the podcast with 2-3 questions for debate in-class, ones that allow us to make use of the course reading in this and prior weeks.
- ✓ Once you've got some ideas and notes, get together with your group members and record your 15-minute discussion as an .mp3 file. As digital recorders are common in phones and tablets, it shouldn't be difficult to find the technology to do this. If nobody in the group has a recording device, contact me as soon as possible.
- ✓ Don't edit the file or restart if you say something incorrect. Think of this as a live performance. Have a natural conversation about the readings vs. a rigid script.

Email the file to me by 8AM Sunday morning before your assigned week. If the file is too big to attach (10+ mb), upload it to google and send me a link at [thainion@gmail.com](mailto:thainion@gmail.com) – I'll download the file and post it on Moodle. The rest of the class will listen to your recording and respond to it, first in seminar, then in the discussion forum, as applicable. Late penalties are 33% a day—i.e. after 8AM Sunday, Monday, Tuesday.

**Class Debate (15%)** – In the second half of March, the course direction will choose a current, appropriate topic and recommend reading to be added for the week of December 2 (e.g. a short article). On December 2, you will be divided into small teams, and asked to prepare a) a written press release serving as a response, and b) several Twitter responses that summarize your chosen Damage Control Technique. Teams will be randomly assigned to one of the three primary Damage Control clusters. One will use a strategy based on aspects of the Denial cluster, one will borrow from the Diminish cluster, and one will adopt from the Rebuild cluster. (See Coombs 2007, Week 4). Compose, read aloud, take 24 hours to revise, and submit. A draft must be presented to the class, who will vote on the best approach overall (the winners will earn a small bonus to their grade). Further details will be provided on Moodle as the end of the semester draws near.

**Take Home Exam (20%)** – Find a recent (last 10 years) **Canadian PR crisis** case that has **not** been studied on the course. Apply the theories you've learned from the readings to that Canadian PR crisis case. Write an 6-8 page, ~2000 word paper that explains the case and then analyzes making direct reference to at least six good sources and to as many course terms as are applicable. No outside sources beyond the readings are needed, but engagement with the readings is vital. You may revisit the themes of your weekly reading assignments, but please compose all-original content for this paper. Reference your sources and cite in-text accordingly. Include a Works cited.

I recommend taking notes each week from the readings as you progress through the course – then when you write the paper you do not have to reread the articles to find secondary material. Include citations to course readings & a bibliography in MLA/ Chicago format. Your paper should be submitted no later than December 12 at 11:59PM on Moodle.

## **Grading**

Assignments will graded in accordance with York University's Undergraduate Calendar (i.e. A+ = 90-100, A = 80-89, B+=75-79 etc.). (See: <http://www.yorku.ca/rocal/2011-2012/academic/grades/>).

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## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS:**

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following information, (available on the Senate Committee on Curriculum & Academic Standards webpage) at <http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/index-policies.html/>.

- York's Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures/Academic Integrity Website
- Course requirement accommodation for students with disabilities, including physical, medical, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities
- Student Conduct Standards and Religious Observance Accommodation

For added clarity:

ANY USE OF ANOTHER PERSON'S WORK, WHETHER IN PRINT OR ELECTRONIC FORM, WITHOUT PROPER CITATION CONSTITUTES PLAGIARISM AND WILL LEAD TO CHARGES OF A BREACH OF ACADEMIC HONESTY.

Please see the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty at:

<http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=69>

### **A brief note on plagiarism: DON'T DO IT!**

- If you can find the sources from which to plagiarize, your instructor can find them.
- The consequences of plagiarism can range from a zero on the plagiarized assignment to removal from the university and withholding of an academic degree in the future.
- Students should consult a published style guide for the correct format of MLA OR Chicago style.
- You are required to cite all sources you quote or paraphrase: books, articles, films, magazines, newspapers, reviews, etc. **All internet sources must be documented.**
- Accordingly, the course director would like to acknowledge the concepts for this course that are adapted from Duncan Koerber's version of WRIT 4711 (an earlier version of the same course).
- Please note that Wikipedia is not an acceptable **academic** source.

### **ACCESS/DISABILITY**

York provides services for students with disabilities (including physical, medical, learning and psychiatric disabilities) needing accommodation related to teaching and evaluation methods/materials. It is the student's responsibility to register with disability services as early as possible to ensure that appropriate academic accommodation can be provided with advance notice. You are encouraged to schedule a time early in the term to meet with each professor to discuss your accommodation needs. Failure to make these arrangements may jeopardize your opportunity to receive academic accommodations. Additional information is available at [www.yorku.ca/disabilityservices](http://www.yorku.ca/disabilityservices).

## **STUDENT CONDUCT**

A statement on the policy and procedures involving disruptive and/or harassing behaviour by students in academic situations is available on the York website <http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=82>

### **What you can expect from me:**

- An organized and accessible classroom environment in which everyone has an equal opportunity to express her or his ideas.
- My availability outside of class to discuss assignments and course material. Please make use of my office hours for these discussions. I am always happy to meet with you, but you will get much better feedback if you let me know you are coming and what you want to talk about in advance.
- Prompt response to email messages (Please note: email should be used for communicating information and setting up appointments. Students should not expect to make up missed classes through email correspondence).

## COURSE SCHEDULE/READINGS BY WEEK

Sept. 10      **1. Course Introduction**

Sept. 17      **2. The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly\* (45)**

**Jon Sufrin**

### **Reading:**

- Duke, S., & Masland, L. (2002). "Crisis communication by the book." *Public Relations Quarterly*, 47(3), 30–35. <http://bit.ly/1f6Fx6T>
- Ulmer, R. (2001). "Effective Crisis Management through Established Stakeholder Relationships." *Management Communication Quarterly*, 14(4), 590–615. <http://bit.ly/JCA7Cx>
- Wrigley, B. J., Ota, S., & Kikuchi, A. (2006). "Lightning strikes twice: Lessons learned from two food poisoning incidents in Japan." *Public Relations Review*, 32(4), 349–357. <http://bit.ly/1a9pbqb>
- Garber, M. "The Leaked Louis C.K. Set Is Tragedy Masked as Comedy." *The Atlantic*, 31 Dec 2018. <https://bit.ly/2VAKlcn>

Sept. 24      **3. William Benoit & Image Repair\* (39)**

### **Reading:**

- Benoit, W. L. (1997b). "Image repair discourse and crisis communication." *Public Relations Review*, 23(2), 177–186. <http://bit.ly/1lJcjb>
- Benoit, W. L. (1997a). "Hugh Grant's image restoration discourse: An actor apologizes." *Communication Quarterly*, 45(3), 251–267. <http://bit.ly/1galb9s>
- Benoit, W. L. (2014). "Bully or Dupe?: Governor Chris Christie's Image Repair on the Bridge Lane Closure Scandal." *Speaker & Gavel*, 52(2), 54-67. <https://bit.ly/2Fbg4LD>

Oct. 1        **4. Coombs' Response Strategies\* (43)**

### **Reading:**

- Coombs, W. T. (1995). "Choosing the Right Words: the development of guidelines for the selection of the "appropriate" crisis-response strategies." *Management Communication Quarterly*, 8(4), 447–476. <http://bit.ly/JCAyww>
- Coombs, W. T. (2007). "Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory." *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163 – 76. <https://bit.ly/2QL5MJh>

**Oct. 8            Reading Week**

**Oct. 15           5. First Among Equals?: The Response Strategy of Apology\* (52)**

**Reading:**

- Hearit, K. M. (1995). “‘Mistakes were made’: Organizations, apologia, and crises of social legitimacy.” *Communication Studies*, 46(1-2), 1–17. <http://bit.ly/1gam2qt>
- Rowland, R. C., & Jerome, A. M. (2004). “On Organizational Apologia: A Reconceptualization.” *Communication Theory*, 14(3), 191–211. <http://bit.ly/JVVmig>
- Greenberg, J., & Elliott, C. (2009). “A Cold Cut Crisis: Listeriosis, Maple Leaf Foods, and the Politics of Apology.” *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 34(2), 189-204. <http://bit.ly/1ed2Qqu>

**Oct. 22           6. Media Factors I\* (52)**

**Reading:**

- Austin, L., Fisher B.L., & Yan, J. (2012) “How Audiences Seek Out Crisis Information: Exploring the Social Mediated Crisis Communication Model.” *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, Vol. 40(2), May 2012, 188-207. <https://bit.ly/2Rdds7a>
- Koerber, D. (2015) “Fundamental Mediation: A Classification of Media in Crisis Communication and Damage Control Research.” *Canadian Journal of Media Studies* 13(1), 91–123. <https://bit.ly/2LTuuBr>

**Oct. 29           7. Media Factors II\* (26)**

**Reading:**

- Ott, L. and Theunissen P. (2015) “Reputations at risk: Engagement during social media crises.” *Public Relations Review* 41(1), 97–102. <https://bit.ly/2Rdj7KB>
- Jeanine, P.D. et. al. (2017) “Ebola on Instagram and Twitter: How health organizations address the health crisis in their social media engagement.” *Public Relations Review*, 43(3): 477-486. <https://bit.ly/2Ruev1Z>
- Roshan, M., Warren, M., And Carr, R. (2016) “Understanding the use of social media by organisations for crisis communication.” *Computers in Human Behaviour Theory*. October 2016 Vol. 63, 350-361. <https://bit.ly/2Qw2hkY>

**Nov. 5      8. Application I: The Political Sphere\* (44)**

**Reading:**

- Benoit, W. (2017) Image Repair on the Donald Trump “Access Hollywood” Video: “Grab Them by the P\*ssy”, *Communication Studies*, 68(3), 243-259. <https://bit.ly/2CVJdJd>
- Koerber, D. (2014) “Crisis Communication Response and Political Communities: The Unusual Case of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford.” *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 39 (3): 311–331. <https://bit.ly/2SLScSU>
- Kent, M.L., Boatwright, B.C. (2018) “Ritualistic sacrifice in crisis communication: A case for eliminating scapegoating from the crisis/apologia lexicon.” *Public Relations Review*, 44(4): 514-522. <https://bit.ly/2SHytUc>

**Nov. 12      9. Application II: Sports Celebrities\* (32)**

**Reading:**

- Holdener, M. & Kauffman, J. (2014). “Getting out of the doghouse: The image repair strategies of Michael Vick.” *Public Relations Review*, 40(1), 92–99. <http://bit.ly/1OLqEZJ>
- Richards, M. et al. (2017) “A knockout to the NFL’s reputation?: A case study of the NFL’s crisis communications strategies in response to the Ray Rice scandal.” *Public Relations Review*, 43(3): 615-623. <https://bit.ly/2Rfr4yT>
- Koerber, D., and Zabara, N. (2017) “Preventing Damage: The Psychology of Crisis Communication Buffers in Organized Sports.” *Public Relations Review*, 43(1): 193-200. <https://bit.ly/2Tzr6OM>

**Nov. 19      10. Application III: The Corporate World\* (21)**

**Reading:**

- Choi, J. (2012) “A content analysis of BP's press releases dealing with crisis.” *Public Relations Review*, 38(3): 422-429. <https://bit.ly/2FddggU>
- Zhu, L. Anagondahalli, D., Zhang, A. (2017) “Social media and culture in crisis communication: McDonald’s and KFC crises management in China.” *Public Relations Review*, 43(3): 487-492. <https://bit.ly/2Trqxq2>
- Kim, S., Zhang, X. A. Zhang, B.W. (2016) “Self-mocking crisis strategy on social media: Focusing on Alibaba chairman Jack Ma in China.” *Public Relations Review*, 42(5): 903-912. <https://bit.ly/2RaiLnU>

**Nov. 26      11. Application IV: Toronto Daze, Press Release Warm-up**

**Readings: (Note: Actual readings to be announced; these were last years versions. Whatever is in the news!)**

- **York University**
  - Bell, J. (2019) “Fix the transit fare fiasco at York U — for all our sakes.” *Toronto Star*, 6 Jan 2019. <https://bit.ly/2RfvTIk>
  - Spurr, B. (2019) “York students fume as ‘outrageous’ GO bus changes take effect, forcing many to pay two fares.” *Toronto Star*, 7 January 2019 <https://bit.ly/2QvjYAP>
  - Lenton, R. (2018) “Transit Update” 13 Dec 2018. Email communication. <https://bit.ly/2FatA2P>
- **St. Michael’s Hazing/Abuse Scandal**
  - Warren, M. (2018) “What we know and don’t know about the scandal at St. Michael’s College School — and what we can’t report.” *Toronto Star*, 19 December 2018. <https://bit.ly/2C3XaTD>
- **Dean Blundell**
  - Mclean, J & Bruser, D. (2014) “Dean Blundell: ‘I am not a homophobe’ ” *Toronto Star*, 10 January 2014. <https://bit.ly/2FeO2yU>
  - Mudhar, R. & Rush, C. (2015) “Dean Blundell takes over morning show on Sportsnet 590 The Fan.” *Toronto Star*, 20 January 2015. <https://bit.ly/2VyHdOo>
  - Mudhar, R. (2018) “Dean Blundell returns to Toronto radio as fill-in on Newstalk 1010.” *Toronto Star*, 19 December 2018. <https://bit.ly/2C2JgRF>

**Dec. 2      12. Composing a Practical Response: Class Debate**

**Reading**

- A Current Event To Be Announced

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**Term ends April 4.**