COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE: CRISIS COMMUNICATION

COURSE DATA

Degree	European Track
Academic Year	2025-2026
Credits	3
Course type	Elective
Departament	Global Communication
Language of instruction	English
Name and email of instructor	Manuel Romero mrgonzalezllanos@comillas.edu

SHORT DESCRIPTION

This course provides students with the theoretical foundations and practical skills to manage communication during crises. Students will examine the nature of crises, crisis communication strategies, and the role of leadership and spokespersons. By analyzing real-world case studies, they will learn to identify stakeholders, manage reputation, and design crisis communication plans. The course emphasizes prevention, detection, containment, and post-crisis recovery in both traditional and digital media contexts. By the end, students will be able to lead the communication response during crises and draft a comprehensive crisis communication plan for organizations.

CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE

Topic 1: Introduction to Crisis Communication – definitions, relevance, and first case study.

Topic 2: Reputation and Stakeholders – reputation theory, target audiences, and public opinion.

Topic 3: Types of Crisis – classification, internal, external, and online crises.

Topic 4: The Five Stages of a Crisis – detection, prevention, containment, recovery, and learning.

Topic 5: Prevention and Risk Analysis – issues management, risk assessment, and case study.

Topic 6: Preparation – crisis plans, crisis committees, and training exercises.

Topic 7: Containment – guidelines, leadership, spokesperson roles, and media training.

Topic 8: Social Media and Crisis Communication – online strategies and guiding principles.

Topic 9: Post-Crisis Management – image restoration, lessons learned, and organizational resilience.

METHODOLOGY

The course is delivered in a blended online format, combining synchronous and asynchronous activities. Students will attend one 50-minute live session each week for 12 weeks, designed to introduce key concepts, facilitate discussion, and provide guidance on assignments. The majority of learning takes place asynchronously, through recorded lectures, assigned readings, auto-graded quizzes, and peer-evaluated tasks, allowing students to interact autonomously with the material. This structure ensures flexibility while maintaining academic rigor. Individual and group assignments reinforce applied learning, while case studies and simulations provide practical training. The methodology emphasizes experiential learning, ensuring students acquire both theoretical knowledge and hands-on skills to manage communication effectively in crisis situations.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Assessment type	Assessment criteria	Percentage
Assignment 1 — Rapid Response Brief	Online scenario-based exercise, delivered through an auto-graded quiz. Students identify key facts, risks, and stakeholders in a simulated crisis. Criteria: accuracy, prioritisation.	(20%)
Assignment 2 — Message Pack	Template-based task in which students prepare a holding statement, media lines, and two short social posts. Criteria: coherence, tone, audience fit, clarity.	(20%)
Asynchronous Online Quizzes	Short multiple-choice and case-based questions linked to asynchronous course content (readings, recorded lectures). All activities are self-graded. Criteria: comprehension of concepts, consistency across modules.	(20%)
Assignment 3 — Personal Case Study Analysis	Individual written analysis of a real crisis (2–3 pages). Students evaluate organizational decisions, messaging, and outcomes, and propose alternative strategies. Criteria: depth of insight, evidence, lessons learned.	(20%)
Final Online Test	Case-based test including short answers and multiple-choice questions. Criteria: understanding of concepts, application to scenarios.	(20%)

– Committing any serious academic misconduct, such as **plagiarism** of previously published material, or **copying** in the exam or any other graded activity, **will imply not being able to pass the course in the ordinary assessment period.**

– The **use of AI** to create complete works or relevant parts, without citing the source or the tool or without being expressly allowed in the description of the work, will be considered plagiarism and regulated according to the General Regulations of the University.

– At the beginning of the term the professor will announce the **office hours** for the course. Tutorials are an essential part of the development of the course, and students may attend tutorials during the course within those office times, but it is recommended that they are arranged in advance with the professor.

– Any non-face-to-face **learning activity** that requires the **submission** of an assignment/document, etc. will be submitted by the student through Moodle, always in PDF format.

– To be able to take the final exam, students must not have missed **more than one third of the classes without justification**. If this requirement is not met, the student may lose the right to be assessed both in the ordinary and extraordinary assessment period (art. 93-1 of the General Regulations).

STUDENT WORKLOAD (in hours)

Contact hours	Outside classroom	OVERALL	
15	135	150	

READING LIST / relevant references

Adubato, S. (2008). *What Were They Thinking?: Crisis Communication: The Good, the Bad, and the Totally Clueless.* Rutgers University Press.

Benoit, W. L. (2015). *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research* (2nd ed.). SUNY Press.

Cierva, Y. de. (2018). *Leading companies through storms and crises: Principles and best practices in prevention, crisis management and communication.* IESE.

Coombs, W. T. (2019). *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (5th ed.). SAGE.

Coombs, W. T., & Halladay, S. (2010). *Handbook of Crisis Communication*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Fearn-Banks, K. (2017). *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach*. Routledge.

Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2017). *Organizational Crisis Communication: A Multivocal Approach*. SAGE.

Heath, R. L., & O'Hair, H. (2008). *Handbook of Risk and Crisis Communication*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Littlefield, R., & Averbeck, H. (2015). *Risk and Crisis Communication: Navigating the Tensions between Organizations and the Public*. Lexington Books.

Millar, D. P. (2003). *Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication*. Taylor & Francis.

Wheeler, A. (2019). *Crisis Communications Management*. PRCA Practice Guides. Emerald.

Zaremba, A. J. (2015). *Crisis Communication: Theory and Practice*. Taylor & Francis.