



Owen Kulemeka

**Crisis Communication, Millennials
and the College Classroom: Lessons
Learned Teaching Future Crisis Managers
How to Handle Crisis Communication**

INTERNATIONAL
CRISIS & RISK
COMMUNICATION
CONFERENCE • 2013

The logo for the International Crisis & Risk Communication Conference (ICRC) features the letters 'I', 'C', 'R', and 'C' in white, each inside a red speech bubble. The bubbles are arranged in a slightly overlapping, horizontal line.



Crisis Communication, Millennials &
the College Classroom:
Lessons Learned Teaching Future Crisis Managers
How to Handle Crisis Communication

Owen Kulemeka
Assistant Professor, Public Relations
University of Oklahoma

March 2013



Teaching a Crisis Communication Course to Undergraduates:

- An opportunity to show how communication & PR theory can help address contemporary problems.
- A chance to provide important skills to strategic communication graduates.
- A dynamic course with interesting subject matter.



Crisis Communication at the University of Oklahoma:

- Combined course (Juniors, Seniors, & Masters students)
- 35 students
- Elective course taken after PR Writing, PR Research, PR Publications, & Writing For Mass Media.



Initial Design and Implementation of Course (Fall 2011)

- I followed suggestions outlined in Dr. Coombs' article:

Teaching the crisis management/communication course
Public Relations Review 27 (2001) 89–101



The course objectives were that students would learn to:

- Define crisis, identify different types of crises.
- Explain how crises differ from other organizational events.
- Understand different phases of a crisis & responsibilities of communications professionals in each phase.
- Conduct issues management to identify sources, analyze information, & recommend action to prevent a crisis.



The course objectives were that students would learn to:

- Explain the responsibilities of a crisis management team.
- Draft parts of crisis management plan (e.g. crisis management contact sheet, crisis risk assessment, communication strategy worksheet, incident report sheet).
- Outline role of notification system, crisis control center, intranet- internet, & social media in crisis management.



The course objectives were that students would learn to:

- Understand importance of managing uncertainty, effective leadership, & communicating effectively about risk.
- Identify the ethical dilemmas that emerge during a crisis & effective ways of addressing them.
- Understand the importance of addressing issues of diversity when planning for crises.
- Explain how to promote organizational learning after crisis.



Projects that were assigned:

- **Crisis vulnerability assessment paper & presentation:** Examine an organization and identify the areas of vulnerability that make it susceptible to a crisis.
- **Crisis analysis research paper & presentation :** Examine how an organization used communication to handle a crisis.
- **Crisis management plan project & presentation :** Develop a crisis management plan for an organization.



Projects that were assigned:

- **Case Study Exercises:** Examine a famous crisis using a relevant crisis communication concept (e.g., uncertainty, group decision making, leadership, ethics).



Lesson 1: What worked well in Fall 2011:



Case Study Exercises: Students enjoyed watching various well produced documentaries in which they could explore crisis concepts. Millennials love engaging multimedia.



Lesson 2: What did not work well in Fall 2011:

Crisis vulnerability assessment paper & presentation problems:

- Vulnerability assessments of US based Fortune 500 corporations are easy to find and do.
- For US-based public institutions, finding analyses was easy.
- Millennials often focus on minimum work-maximum gain: many assignments were simply Googled and generic.
- In a class of 35, hard to keep presentations from going over. How to allow everyone time in the spotlight.



Lesson 3: What did not work well in Fall 2011:

Crisis analysis research paper & presentation problems:

- The popular crises have been over analyzed:
BP Toyota Recall Tylenol Exxon Valdez
Johnson & Johnson Bhopal Three Mile Island
- Millennials with a minimum work-maximum gain approach scan academic papers and reuse them in their analyses.
- In a class of 35, hard to keep presentations from going over.



Lesson 4: What did not work well in Fall 2011:

Limited “real time” exercises

- Students noted that they wanted to learn how to address crises in real time.
- What to do when a crisis is occurring. Students and reviewers thought this part was missing in the assignments.



Lesson 5: What did not work well in Fall 2011:

Limited discussion of issues of diversity

- Reviewers noted that students should learn how to address issues of diversity in crisis.
- What to do when a crisis involves issues of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.
- Although in course objectives, this was not adequately addressed in course content.



Lesson 6: Changes made in Fall 2012

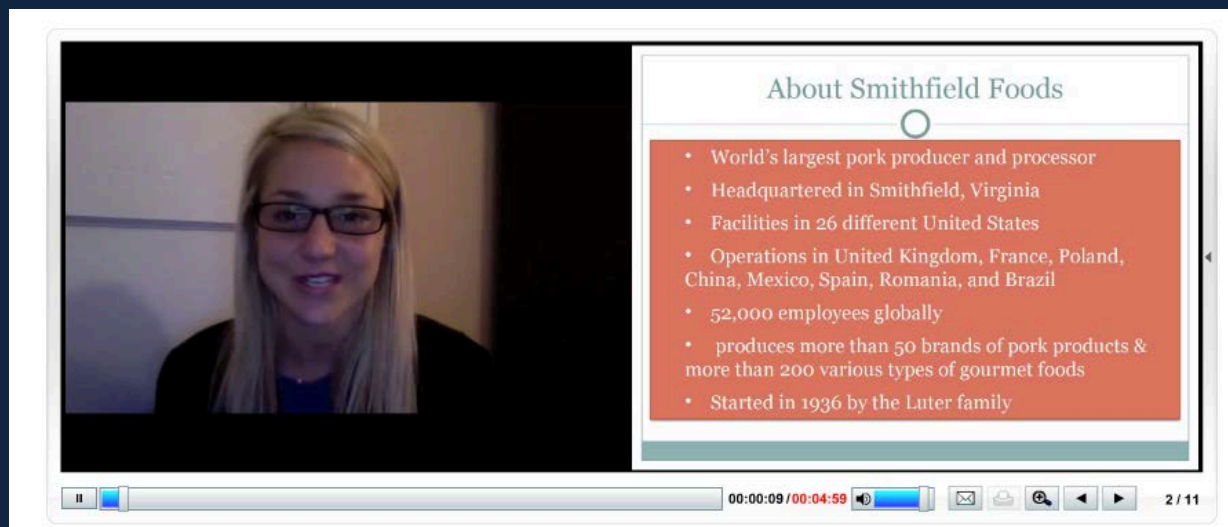
Crisis vulnerability assessment paper & presentation solution 1:

- Students given primarily global non-US brands like TATA, BHP Billiton, Ssyangyong, Royal Mail, Asda, Roger Wireless.
- The result was more in-depth analyses as students unfamiliar with organizations couldn't rely on easy to find Googled content.
- Focusing on foreign contexts also resulted in more in-depth analyses of how society-culture affect crisis vulnerability.

Lesson 7: Changes made in Fall 2012

Crisis vulnerability assessment paper & presentation solution 2

- Instead of live presentations, we used VCASMO, platform where video and slide presentations can be pre-recorded.
- Result: Timely presentations; no presentation fright.



The screenshot shows a video player interface. On the left, a woman with blonde hair and glasses is speaking. On the right, a slide titled "About Smithfield Foods" is displayed. The slide contains a bulleted list of facts about the company. At the bottom of the video player, there is a progress bar showing 00:00:09 / 00:04:59, a volume icon, and a page indicator showing 2 / 11.

About Smithfield Foods

- World's largest pork producer and processor
- Headquartered in Smithfield, Virginia
- Facilities in 26 different United States
- Operations in United Kingdom, France, Poland, China, Mexico, Spain, Romania, and Brazil
- 52,000 employees globally
- produces more than 50 brands of pork products & more than 200 various types of gourmet foods
- Started in 1936 by the Luter family

00:00:09 / 00:04:59 2 / 11



Lesson 8: Changes made in Fall 2012

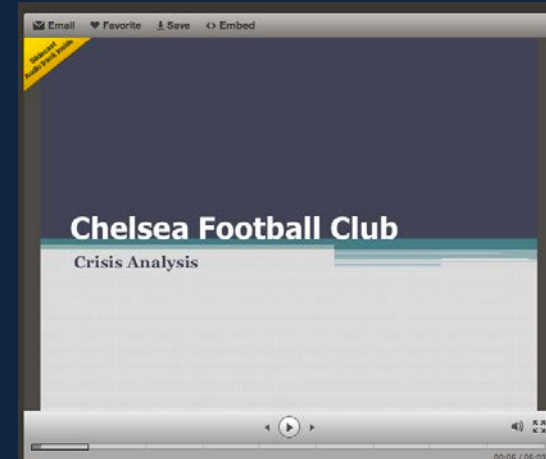
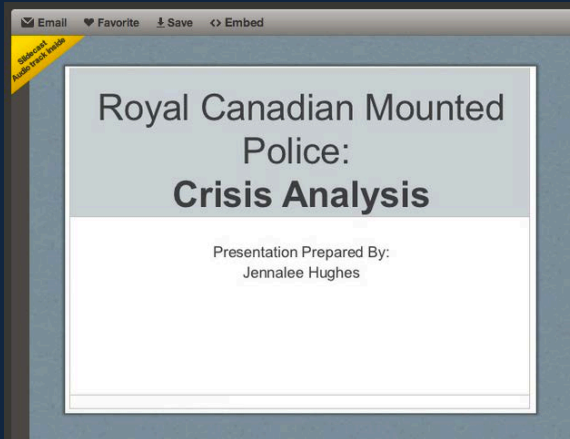
Crisis analysis paper & presentation solution 3:

- Students given primarily crises in English speaking, non-US contexts: [BBC abuse scandal](#), [Formula 1](#), [Royal Canadian Mounted Police](#)
- The result was more in-depth analyses as students were unfamiliar with organizations and couldn't simply Google.
- Focusing on foreign contexts also resulted in in-depth analyses of how contexts affect crisis response.



Lesson 9: Changes made in Fall 2012

- **Crisis analysis paper & presentation solution 4:**
Instead of live presentations, we used SLIDESHARE SLIDECAST platform where audio and slide presentations can be pre-recorded.
- **Result:** Timely presentations; no presentation fright.





Lesson 10: Changes made in Fall 2012

Crisis management plan project & presentation solution 5 :

- Instead of live presentations, we used KNOODLE platform where audio and slide presentations can be pre-recorded.
- Result: Timely presentations; no presentation fright





Lesson 11: Changes made in Fall 2012

Real-Time Exercises: to address the demand for real-time exercises, 5 exercises were added:

- **1 Contingency Statement:** students presented with upcoming crisis and told to write a statement in advance:





Lesson 11: Changes made in Fall 2012

Real-Time Exercises: to address the demand for real-time exercises, 5 exercises were added:

- **2-3: Talking Points-Speech:** students were presented with an ongoing crisis and told to write talking points-speech in response.





Lesson 11: Changes made in Fall 2012

Real-Time Exercises: to address the demand for real-time exercises, 5 exercises were added:

- **4: Letter to the Editor-Guest Editorial:** students are presented with negative media coverage and told to write letter to the editor & guest editorial to respond.





Lesson 11: Changes made in Fall 2012

Real-Time Exercises: to address the demand for real-time exercises, 5 exercises were added:

- **5: Media Performance Critique:** students are presented with a problematic media performance and are instructed to give suggestions on how to improve.





Lesson 12: Changes made in Fall 2012

Diversity: to address the need to discuss issues of diversity in detail, two assignments were added:



A book review and discussion assignment that addressed the challenges racial-ethnic minorities and people with disabilities face in disaster situations.



Lesson 13: Changes made in Spring 2012

Diversity: In 2013, we will examine a crisis in Alice Springs (Australia) and how to navigate issues in a social-culturally complex crisis environment. We will work with Australian crisis experts to see how they address these issues.

