

The Graduate School of Political Management
The George Washington University
Spring 2009

CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN AMERICAN POLITICS

(PMGT 241)

Michael D. Edwards

Overview

This course examines the management of crisis situations, turning points, and defining moments in contemporary electoral, legislative and public policy campaigns, in governmental decision-making, and in corporate affairs. It is designed to help students develop the tools and techniques necessary to predict, identify, isolate, avert, manage and even capitalize on such situations.

The course will be conducted as a seminar emphasizing indepth class participation and discussion. Through examination of recent case studies and the use of simulation exercises, it explores both the theoretical and practical aspects of crisis management in today's world.

Textbooks

The *required* textbooks for this course are:

- Steven Fink, Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable, iUniverse, 2000
- Laurence Barton, Crisis in Organizations II, South-Western College Publishing, 2001
- Harvard Business Essentials: Crisis Management, Harvard Business School Press, 2004
- Ian Mitroff, Christine Pearson, L. Katharine Harrington, The Essential Guide to Managing Corporate Crises, Oxford University Press, 1996

There are also a number of *recommended* books that augment the required texts. These include:

- Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, Pearson, 1999
- Jeffrey Caponigro, The Crisis Counselor: A Step-by-Step Guide to Managing a Business Crisis, McGraw-Hill, 2000
- Lanny Davis, Scandal: How Gotcha Politics Is Destroying America, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006
- Suzanne Garment, Scandal: The Culture of Mistrust in American Politics, Times Books, New York, 1991
- Harvard Business Review on Crisis Management, Harvard Business School Press, 2000
- Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction and Democracy, Oxford University Press, 1993
- Ian Mitroff, Managing Crises Before They Happen, AMACOM, 2001
- Ian Mitroff and Thierry Pauchant, We're So Big and Powerful Nothing Bad Can Happen To Us, Birch Lane Books, New York, 1990
- Larry Sabato, Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism Has Transformed American Politics, Lanahan Publishing, 2000

- Alan Schroeder, Presidential Debates: Forty Years of High-Risk TV, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000

Additional readings will be available on reserve at the George Washington University Library or distributed by the instructor.

All reading assignments should be completed at a reasonable pace throughout the term with the caveat that students should be prepared to discuss each assignment at the class at which it is scheduled for discussion.

Students should also be familiar with recent American political history and are therefore encouraged to review books and related materials regarding the 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 U.S. Presidential campaigns.

Course Requirements

Students will be required to complete a comprehensive research, analysis, and writing assignment as well as one group research, analysis and presentation project. Details about the two assignments will be distributed at the second class of the semester. The components of the final class grades will be as follows: individual research and analysis project (50%); group presentation project (25%); general preparation for and participation in class discussions (25%).

Office Hours

Professor Edwards maintains offices near the George Washington University campus and will gladly make himself available for consultations with students during the week. In addition, students should feel free to call him with questions. He can be reached at (202) 822-7564. Faxes can be sent to 202-822-7117. He can be reached at either of two email addresses: MEdwards@nea.org or Edwardsm@gwu.edu.

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CLASS SCHEDULE

1. January 14 Introduction -- Crisis Management in American Politics

Introduction to crisis management in the electoral, legislative, and issue management arenas. Outline of the material to be covered. Discussion of the required readings, assignments, and course projects.

2. January 21 Anatomy of a Crisis

Overview of the theoretical and practical aspects of crises and crisis management in the political world. Exploration of the differences between crises and turning points in the political realm and those in corporate, international, and public policy settings. Discussion of the dynamics of crisis management including the nature and stages of crises, participant behavior in crisis situations, and the impact of the crisis environment on decision-making in campaigns and in legislative advocacy. Examination of the potential opportunities and benefits presented by crises.

3. January 28 Portraits of Crisis

Exploration and analysis of recent case studies relating to crisis management in the electoral, issues management, and legislative arenas. Defining characteristics of crisis situations. Identifying crises before they happen.

4. February 4 Decision-Making in a Crisis Environment (1)

Exploration of the organizational dynamics and decision-making processes in the legislative/political environment. Practical and theoretical approaches to participant behavior in crisis situations. Examination of organizational dysfunction during crises.

5. February 11 Decision-Making in a Crisis Environment (2)

Discussion of internal operations and structure, stakeholder relationships, internal information flow, and response capabilities. Exploration of adversarial responses to crisis situations and actions. Approaches to risk assessment and crisis planning.

NOTE: Crisis management project proposal due.

6. February 18 The Media and the Crisis

Discussion of the mass media and crisis management in the political and corporate worlds. How the media covers crisis situations and affects the crisis environment. Examination of the increasing personalization of politics by the media. Problems of episodic coverage. The impact of the media on crisis management strategies and tactics.

7. February 25 Crisis Communications

Exploration of communications and public relations tactics and strategies in crisis -- and potential crisis -- situations. Discussion of crafting of communications action plans; message development and delivery; advertising approaches; government and community relations activities; media, press and public relations efforts.

8. March 4 Case Studies in Crisis Management

Presentation of student group projects.

9. March 11 Case Studies in Crisis Management

Presentation of student group projects

10. March 25 .Debates

Discussion of the role candidate debates play as a turning point in electoral campaigns, the impact of media on debates, debate preparation and follow-through.

11. April 1 Scandal

An examination of the obsession with scandal in American political life and its impact on political and public policy strategies and outcomes. Exploration of the tools and techniques to prevent, avert, isolate, and/or manage such situations.

12. April 8 Negative Advertising

Examination of the dynamics and impact of negative advertising in electoral politics today. Discussion of effective strategies to respond to negative advertising.

13. April 15 Planning for the Inevitable

Examination of the tools and techniques for identifying, preventing, managing, and capitalizing on crisis situations. Discussion of strategic planning and crisis forecasting, crisis management plans, organizational structure, crisis aversion and response tactics.

14. April 29 The Business of Crisis Management

Examination of the resources available to assist in crisis management situations including polling, issue research, opposition research, government relations, community relations, communications development and public relations, issues management and campaign consultants.

Crisis management research and analysis project due.