

**Business P731  
Crisis Management & Communications  
Winter 2021 Course Outline**

**DeGroot School of Business McMaster University  
Tuesday 7:00 – 10:00 pm**

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***COURSE OBJECTIVE***

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Crises are a fact of organizational life. From the small, not-for-profit organization to the global, multinational corporation, crises can suddenly disrupt an organization's ability to efficiently and effectively achieve its mission. Organizational crises rapidly consume unbudgeted financial and human resources and diminish an organization's reputation and goodwill. The economic, social, and political fallout from organizational crises have been significant: The price tag for Volkswagen's emissions scandal ... more than \$18 billion; ... to clean up BP's Gulf of Mexico spill ... \$20 billion; the cost to the economy of Toronto following the SARS crisis ... \$1.5 billion; Maple Leaf Foods loss of market value ... \$136 million.

Therefore, the objectives for this course are:

1. To understand the nature and importance of crises and crisis management from a systemic and leadership perspective.
  2. To gain diagnostic skills to detect and prevent escalation of negative organizational issues into uncontrollable crisis situations.
  3. To learn the distinguishing features of crisis preparedness and methods to advance their adoption in human systems.
  4. To understand the prime challenges to enhancing crisis preparedness and some methods of change management to counter these conditions
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***INSTRUCTOR AND CONTACT INFORMATION***

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**Cynthia Breen, MCM, PhD (c)**  
*Professor, Public Relations*  
Conestoga College  
breenc2@mcmaster.ca

**Pauline Berry, MCM**  
*Teaching Assistant*  
Senior Marketing Coordinator, KPMG  
paulinebonnie@gmail.com

**Course website:** <http://AVENUE.mcmaster.ca>

***COURSE ELEMENTS***

Credit Value: 3	Leadership: Yes	IT skills: No	Global view: Yes
Avenue: Yes	Ethics: Yes	Numeracy: No	Written skills: Yes
Participation: Yes	Innovation: Yes	Group work: Yes	Oral skills: Yes
Evidence-based: Yes	Experiential: Yes	Final Exam: Yes	Guest speaker(s): Yes

***COURSE DESCRIPTION***

This course provides leaders with conceptual tools to successfully master high-pressure, complex crisis scenarios. Topics include managing issues and media, dealing with activists and interest groups, and surviving legal, legislative, and regulatory challenges. Class time will be comprised primarily of lectures, discussion, guest speakers, and in-class crisis simulations. Evaluation components include class participation, written case analyses, and an essay.

***LEARNING OUTCOMES***

Upon completion of this course, students will better understand:

- the determinants of crisis preparedness;
- how organizational decision-making is affected by complexity and uncertainty;
- how to develop and implement a crisis management and communications system;
- how to develop a strategic crisis management and communications plan for an organization.

***REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS***

Avenue registration for course content, readings and case materials

- <http://avenue.mcmaster.ca>

\$ FREE

Coombs, W.T. (2014).

Ongoing crisis communications: Planning, managing and responding. (4th Edition). ISBN: 9781452261362

\$88.00

Crandall, W., Parnall, J.A., & Spillan, J.E. (2014). Crisis management:

Leading in the new strategy landscape (2nd Edition) ISBN: 9781412991681

\$69.00

**OPTIONAL COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS**

A Tale of Five Employees, Corporate Missions Inc.	
➤ Purchase a copy at the bookstore	\$ 59.00 CAD
Strategic Marketing and Pricing, 19th Edition, Oxford University Press	
➤ Purchase a copy at the bookstore	\$ 32.95 CAD
How to analyze a case study, Harvard Business School Press	
➤ Download from <a href="http://www.hbs.edu">www.hbs.edu</a>	\$ 9.50 USD

**EVALUATION**

Learning in this course results primarily from in-class discussion and participation of comprehensive business cases as well as out-of-class analysis. The balance of the learning results from the lectures on strategic concepts, from related readings, and from researching your presentations, cases, assignments, simulation decisions and projects. All work will be evaluated on an individual basis except in certain cases where group work is expected. In these cases, group members will share the same grade adjusted by peer evaluation. Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

**Components and Weights**

<i>Mid-term Exam</i>	15%
<i>Crisis Simulations</i>	20%
Case Study Reviews/Reflections	25%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	20%

Total 100%

NOTE: The use of a McMaster standard calculator is allowed during examinations in this course. See McMaster calculator policy at the following URL:

[www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/UndergraduateExaminationsPolicy.pdf](http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/UndergraduateExaminationsPolicy.pdf)

**Grade Conversion**

At the end of the course your overall percentage grade will be converted to your letter grade in accordance with the following conversion scheme:

LETTER GRADE	PERCENT	POINTS
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A+	90-100	12
A	85-89	11
A-	80-84	10
B+	75-79	9
B	70-74	8
B-	60-69	7
F	00-59	0

**Mid-Term Exam**

Contribution to Final Course Mark: 15%  
An essay, take home exam

**Crisis Simulations**

Contribution to Final Course Mark: 20%

There will be five in-class crisis simulations held during the term and your participation and strategic involvement during four of those simulations will be graded during those simulations.

- Simulation #1 – Small Group Exercise (not graded)
- Simulation #2 – Multiple Stakeholder Exercise (5%)
- Simulation #3 – Crisis Media Conferences (5%)
- Simulation #4 – Multiple Interaction Exercise (5%)
- Simulation #5 – The Final Crisis Simulation (5%)

**Case Study Reviews/ Reflections**

Contribution to Final Course Mark: 25%

Over the course of the term, case studies will be assigned for your review and assessment. A series of questions/insights/comments will accompany each case study. You will be expected to post your responses on Avenue to Learn by the stated deadline.

**Final Exam**

Contribution to Final Course Mark: 20%  
A take home exam on crisis

**Participation**

Contribution to Final Course Mark:

20%

As MBA/MA students, each of you should come to class ready to participate in class discussions. This participation can take many forms—probing for more in-depth information, case-study analysis, etc. Participation marks are geared primarily to the quality of the contribution. That is, I am not looking for someone to simply talk in class to gain credit, but rather to attempt to add value to the discussion with other students, with me, or with outside speakers.

Instructors and TAs will feel free to **cold-call** on anyone at any time. Hence, it is imperative that you prepare for each and every case and reading. In general, contributions are evaluated in an ascending order from physically but not mentally present, to good chip shots, to quite substantial comments, to case cracking contributions. Debate and challenge are important activities that help in the learning process and the willingness of individuals to engage in such activities with their classmates is appreciated. However, using **air-time** involves an obligation to actually contribute. None of us has time for recitation of case facts, bland summaries of prior discussion, and so on, that are devoid of implications. Before you speak, always answer the question **so-what?** Participation will **NOT** be graded by counting each contribution a student makes. Participation will be graded by examining the quality of contributions in each class.

ACTIVITY	DELIVERY	DESCRIPTION	TOOL(S)
Lecture Core Content	Asynch	Recorded lecture vids	Voiceover PPT in Echo360
Readings	Asynch	Tied to weekly discussion prompts	Readings linked in Avenue, from coursepack, or in assigned textbook
Group Discussions	Both	Synch: Breakout rooms during lecture Asynch: A2L Group Discussions	Synch: Zoom Asynch: A2L
Live Lectures	Synch	1hr. live session; opportunity to elaborate on content, present challenges, engage discussion	Zoom

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### COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

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Students that are uncomfortable in directly approaching an instructor regarding a course concern may send a confidential and anonymous email to the respective Area Chair or Associate Dean:

<http://mbastudent.degroot.mcmaster.ca/contact/anonymous/>

Students who wish to correspond with instructors or TAs directly via email must send messages that originate from their official McMaster University email account. This protects the confidentiality and sensitivity of information as well as confirms the identity of the student. Emails regarding course issues should NOT be sent to the Administrative Assistant.

Instructors are encouraged to conduct an informal course review with students by Week #4 to allow time for modifications in curriculum delivery. Instructors should provide evaluation feedback for at least 10% of the final grade to students prior to Week #8 in the term.

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### ***ACADEMIC DISHONESTY***

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You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at:

[www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity)

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations

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### ***AUTHENTICITY/PLAGIARISM DETECTION***

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**Some courses may** use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

**All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

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### ***COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT***

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**Some courses may** use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course.

The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

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### ***ON-LINE PROCTORING***

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**Some courses may** use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

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### ***CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS***

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As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.



It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

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## ***MISSED ACADEMIC WORK***

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### ***Missed Mid-Term Examinations / Tests / Class Participation***

Where students miss a regularly scheduled mid-term or class participation for legitimate reasons as determined by the Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office, the weight for that test/participation will be distributed across other evaluative components of the course at the discretion of the instructor. Documentation explaining such an absence must be provided to the Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office within five (5) working days upon returning to school.

To document absences for health related reasons, please provide to Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office the Petition for Relief for MBA Missed Term Work and the McMaster University Student Health Certificate which can be found on the DeGroote website at <http://mbastudent.degroote.mcmaster.ca/forms-and-applications/>. Please do not use the online McMaster Student Absence Form as this is for Undergraduate students only. University policy states that a student may submit a maximum of three (3) medical certificates per year after which the student must meet with the Director of the program.

To document absences for reasons other than health related, please provide Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office the Petition for Relief for MBA Missed Term Work and documentation supporting the reason for the absence.

Students unable to write a mid-term at the posted exam time due to the following reasons: religious; work-related (for part-time students only); representing university at an academic or varsity athletic event; conflicts between two overlapping scheduled mid-term exams; or other extenuating circumstances, have the option of applying for special exam arrangements. Such requests must be made to the Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office at least ten (10) working days before the scheduled exam along with acceptable documentation. Instructors cannot themselves allow students to unofficially write make-up exams/tests. Adjudication of the request must be handled by Student Experience – Academic (MBA).

If a mid-term exam is missed without a valid reason, students will receive a grade of zero (0) for that component.

### ***Missed Final Examinations***



A student who misses a final examination without good reason will receive a mark of 0 on the examination.

All applications for deferred and special examination arrangements must be made to the Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office. Failure to meet the stated deadlines may result in the denial of these arrangements. Deferred examination privileges, if granted, must be satisfied during the examination period at the end of the following term. There will be one common sitting for all deferred exams.

Failure to write an approved deferred examination at the pre-scheduled time will result in a failure for that examination, except in the case of exceptional circumstances where documentation has been provided and approved. Upon approval, no credit will be given for the course, and the notation N.C. (no credit) will be placed on the student's transcript. Students receiving no credit for a required course must repeat the course. Optional or elective courses for which no credit is given may be repeated or replaced with another course of equal credit value.

Requests for a second deferral or rescheduling of a deferred examination will not be considered.

Any student who is unable to write a final examination because of illness is required to submit the Application for Deferred MBA Final Examination and a statement from a doctor certifying illness on the date of the examination. The Application for Deferred MBA Final Examination and the McMaster University Student Health Certificate can be found on the DeGroot website at <http://mbastudent.degroot.mcmaster.ca/forms-and-applications/> Please do not use the online McMaster Student Absence Form as this is for Undergraduate students only. Students who write examinations while ill will not be given special consideration after the fact.

In such cases, the request for a deferred examination privilege must be made in writing to the Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office within five business days of the missed examination.

Special examination arrangements may be made for students unable to write at the posted exam time due to compelling reasons (for example religious, or for part-time students only, work-related reasons):

- Students who have religious obligations which make it impossible to write examinations at the times posted are required to produce a letter from their religious leader stating that they are unable to be present owing to a religious obligation.
- Part-time students who have business commitments which make it impossible to write examinations at the times posted are required to produce a letter on company letterhead from the student's immediate supervisor stating that they are unable to be present owing to a specific job commitment.

In such cases, applications must be made in writing to the Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office at least ten business days before the scheduled examination date and acceptable documentation must be supplied.

If a student is representing the University at an academic or athletic event and is available at an overlapping scheduled time of the test/examination, the student may write the test/examination at an

approved location with an approved invigilator, as determined by the Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office.

In such cases, the request for a deferred examination privilege must be made in writing to the Student Experience – Academic (MBA) office within ten business days of the end of the examination period.

Note: A fee of \$50 will be charged for a deferred exam written on campus and a fee of \$100 for deferred exams written elsewhere. In cases where the student's standing is in doubt, the Graduate Admissions and Study Committee may require that the student with one or more deferred examination privileges refrain from re-registering until the examination(s) have been cleared.

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### ***ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES***

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Student Accessibility Services (SAS) offers various support services for students with disabilities. Students are required to inform SAS of accommodation needs for course work at the outset of term. Students must forward a copy of such SAS accommodation to the instructor normally, within the first three (3) weeks of classes by setting up an appointment with the instructor. If a student with a disability chooses NOT to take advantage of an SAS accommodation and chooses to sit for a regular exam, a petition for relief may not be filed after the examination is complete. The SAS website is:

<http://sas.mcmaster.ca>

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### ***RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)***

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Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office ***normally within 10 working days*** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

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### ***COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING***

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Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

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### ***POTENTIAL MODIFICATION TO THE COURSE***

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The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

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### ***RESEARCH USING HUMAN SUBJECTS***

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#### ***ONLY IF APPLICABLE***

Research involving human participants is premised on a fundamental moral commitment to advancing human welfare, knowledge, and understanding. As a research intensive institution, McMaster University shares this commitment in its promotion of responsible research. The fundamental imperative of research involving human participation is respect for human dignity and well-being. To this end, the University endorses the ethical principles cited in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans:

<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca>

McMaster University has mandated its Research Ethics Boards to ensure that all research investigations involving human participants are in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement. The University is committed, through its Research Ethics Boards, to assisting the research community in identifying and addressing ethical issues inherent in research, recognizing that all members of the University share a commitment to maintaining the highest possible standards in research involving humans.

If you are conducting original research, it is vital that you behave in an ethical manner. For example, everyone you speak to must be made aware of your reasons for eliciting their responses and consent to providing information. Furthermore, you must ensure everyone understands that participation is entirely voluntary. Please refer to the following website for more information about McMaster University's research ethics guidelines:

<http://reo.mcmaster.ca/>

Organizations that you are working with are likely to prefer that some information be treated as confidential. Ensure that you clarify the status of all information that you receive from your client. You **MUST** respect this request and cannot present this information in class or communicate it in any form, nor can you discuss it outside your group. Furthermore, you must continue to respect this confidentiality even after the course is over.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COURSE POLICIES**

Your registration and continuous participation (e.g. on A2L, in the classroom, etc.) to the various learning activities of MBA XXXX will be considered to be an implicit acknowledgement of the course policies outlined above, or of any other that may be announced during lecture and/or on A2L. **It is your responsibility to read this course outline, to familiarize yourself with the course policies and to act accordingly.**

Lack of awareness of the course policies **cannot be invoked** at any point during this course for failure to meet them. It is your responsibility to ask for clarification on any policies that you do not understand.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

MBA P731

### **Crisis Management & Communications Winter 2020 Course Schedule**

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>ASSIGNMENT</b>
1	Tue. January 12	<b>Introduction, Review of Syllabus</b> Setting the Stage for Crisis Management and Communication Issues, risk and crisis management approaches <b>READINGS:</b> Crandall Chapters 1; Flynn, Into the Vortex (A2L)
2	Tue. January 19	<b>A Framework for Crisis Management</b> <b>READINGS:</b> Crandall Chapters 2-3; Coombs Chapter 1 Flynn, Crisis Leadership (A2L)

3	Tue. January 26	<b><i>Avoiding the Unavoidable</i></b> <b>READINGS:</b> Crandall Chapters 4, 6; Coombs Chapter 3 <b>ACTIVITY: Crisis Simulation #1 – Small Group Crisis Response DUE: Case 1</b>
4	Tue. February 2	<b><i>Crisis Recognition and Planning</i></b> <b>READINGS:</b> Crandall Chapter 5; Coombs Chapter 7 <b>ACTIVITY: Crisis Simulation #2 – Multiple Stakeholder Exercise</b>
5	Tue. February 9	<b><i>Containment and Resolution</i></b> <b>READINGS:</b> Crandall Chapter 9; Coombs Chapters 4-6 <i>Midterm - Due Next Class.</i> <b>DUE: Case 2</b>
6	Tue. February 16	<b>READING WEEK – NO CLASS</b>
7	Tue. February 23	<b><i>Risk Communication</i></b> <b>READINGS:</b> Adler & Kranowitz, A Primer on Perceptions of Risk, Risk Communications and Building Trust. <b>DUE: Midterm Exam</b>
8	Tue. March 2	<b><i>The Management of Organizational Crises</i></b> <b>READINGS:</b> Flynn, <i>Authentic Crisis Leadership (A2L)</i> , Crandall, Chapter 10 <b>DUE: Case 3</b>
9	Tue. March 9	<b><i>Responding to a Crisis</i></b> <b>READINGS:</b> Coombs Chapter 8 <b>ACTIVITY:</b> Crisis Simulation #3 -- Crisis Media Conference Simulation <b>GUEST:</b> Martin Waxman
10	Tue. March 16	<b><i>Telling Your Story and Learning from Your Mistakes</i></b> <b>READINGS:</b> Crandall Chapter 8, Coombs Chapter 2 <b>ACTIVITY: Crisis Simulation #4 – Multiple Interaction Exercise</b>
11	Tue. March 23	<b>Guest Speaker: Terry Flynn</b>
12	Tue. March 30	<b>DEVELOPING THE CRISIS MINDSET</b> <b>READINGS:</b> Crandall Chapter 11, Coombs Chapter 9 & Epilogue Final Exam to Be Handed Out in Class and Posted on A2L - Due Final Class. <b>DUE: Case 5 if required</b> <b>DUE: Case 4 or Reflection</b>

13	Tue. April 6	<b><i>ACTIVITY: Crisis Simulation #5 – The Final Big Bang Crisis simulation</i></b>
14	Tue. April 13	<b>DUE: Final Exam</b>