

Course Syllabus
Spring Term, 2013

**HDDR 6367 – *Media Wars*:
Managing Media-Driven Conflict in Traditional and New Media**

Instructor

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Overview and Objectives

- This course examines how the media, in all forms, may create, contribute to, magnify, worsen or perhaps even alleviate conflict within communities and organizations. We will explore how the decline in “traditional” media – newspapers and over-the-air radio and television channels – is changing how individuals and organizations receive new information and/or distribute it to internal and external audiences and stakeholders. We will also explore how the recent rise of “mass self-communication” through new media such as email, blogs, texting, Twitter and YouTube has created dangerous risks for conflicts to “go viral” even before they can be fully understood by community or organization leaders. But we will also see how this era of new media presents interesting, non-traditional opportunities for conflict resolution.
- Students will learn how the media gather and disseminate information and how standards for what is disseminated publicly have changed dramatically as technology has created avenues of mass communication available to everyone. During class sessions, students will have structured practice in conflict-resolution techniques and message creation under media deadline pressure. We will utilize examples of media-driven conflict and misunderstanding drawn from the instructor’s 40-year career as a news editor, corporate communications executive and educator. Written assignments will focus on assessment of media coverage and the conflict risk and opportunity it presents, as well as action planning for media-driven conflicts.
- Our course objective is to prepare students to assist their clients and organizational stakeholders in responding quickly, accurately and effectively to conflict that occurs under the media “microscope.”

Textbook

- There is no required textbook for this course. However, we will read or view and discuss a number of articles and videos from various media. The instructor will email or supply printed copies of articles to students, and students may bring examples they find in their own research.

Requirements

- Each student will participate in at least three in-class presentations during our two weekends. These will be practical experiences in preparing action plans, responding to media and/or distributing messages for internal and external stakeholders to alleviate conflict under deadline pressure.
- Each student will prepare two written papers for this course. The first, due at the end of the second weekend, will be a risk assessment of how actual media coverage may affect an organization. The first paper should be 5-6 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font. The second paper, due within 30 days of the end of our second weekend, will be an action plan to address a media-driven conflict within an organization. This will be based on a situation of a student's choosing or an example provided by the instructor, and will include a risk and audience assessment, message development, distribution plans and methods to evaluate success. The second paper should be 12-15 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font.

Evaluation and Grading

- Attendance and participation in class discussion will count for 10 percent of the final grade.
- Effectiveness of student presentations in class will count for 25 percent of the final grade.
- The first written paper will count for 25 percent of the final grade.
- The second written paper will count for 40 percent of the final grade.

Course Content

First Weekend: March 8-10, 2013

Friday, 4-9 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

- Friday March 8
 - Introduction to the course and the instructor
 - Why do we care what the media say?
 - How do we receive and distribute “news?”
 - What are “the media” today?
 - The mind of the media: why do different media report differently?
 - Communication is power: The Castells theories

HOMEWORK: Before Sunday’s class session, please read the case study the instructor will give you in class this evening

- Saturday March 9
 - The medium is the message
 - Who filters what the media report? Does absence of a filter matter?
 - “Mass self-communication:” email, blogs, texting, Twitter, YouTube
 - The new “Tom Paine” effect: everyone is a pamphleteer
 - The new means to receive information: smart phones, tablets, laptops
 - The age of “going viral:” Can misinformation really be contained or countered?
- Sunday March 10
 - Communication is power: What does it mean for leaders?
 - Student presentations responding to the case study provided by the instructor

HOMEWORK: Read any articles provided by the instructor. The first written paper is due following the end of our second weekend session on Sunday afternoon, March 24.

Second Weekend: March 22-24, 2013

Friday, 4-9 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

- Friday March 22
 - The power of Google in framing and flaming conflict
 - How do new media really work: Twitter, YouTube, blogs
 - The role of email and tweets in framing and flaming conflict
 - Techniques for managing conflict framed or flamed by new media

HOMEWORK: Each student will bring to Saturday's session an example or two from their own email, tweets, YouTube videos, blogs or other "new media" communication which they believe have or could create misunderstandings and produce conflict.

- Saturday March 23, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Digital and global: containing the viral spread of misinformation
Student examples of new media misunderstandings and conflict
Action plans for reducing/resolving media-driven conflict
How can media *help resolve* conflict?
- Sunday March 24, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Responding to the media: Practice interview sessions
Students, working in pairs, prepare messaging and action plans
under deadline pressure for case studies provided by the instructor

HOMEWORK: The second written paper, a full action plan with risk and audience assessment, messaging, distribution channels and methods to evaluate success, is due within 30 days of the end of our second weekend on March 24.

Policies

- This course examines how the media's portrayal of provocative issues may cause or worsen conflict within an organization. Our class discussions may touch on political, religious or other sensitive matters about which people may disagree. Respect and courtesy for the points of view of your fellow students is a must.
- Students are expected to attend all classes. Much of our coursework will involve role-playing and class participation. Therefore absences can't really be made up. If emergencies arise, please notify the instructor. If a student misses four hours or more of class time, she/he may be required to drop the course.
- If a reading assignment has been made for a class session, students are expected to have read it before that class begins.
- Written assignments must be submitted by the instructor's deadline. Assignments submitted more than a week late will be downgraded by a full letter grade, and no assignments will be accepted if they are more than 30 days late. Please keep both electronic and paper copies of your work.

- Please arrive on time for each class session. Turn off (or set on vibrate) your cell phones. Please avoid the temptation to read or send text messages or surf the web during class time. If you need to leave early, please make sure the instructor knows before class begins, and take your leave quietly.
- You are reminded of the SMU Honor Code in the Student Handbook. Intellectual integrity and academic honesty are the foundation of all learning. Plagiarism or any other form of cheating will not be tolerated and will result in a failure grade for the course.