

**College of Professional Studies
Graduate School of Political Management
Strategic Public Relations Master's Degree Program**

Campus Course Syllabus

PSPR 204 - Media Relations in the New Media World
Spring 2009

Meeting Dates: Tuesday, January 13, 2009, through April 21, 2009

Class Hours: 7:10 p.m. – 9:40 p.m.

(NOTE - Spring Break is March 16 – 20 – No Classes)

Location: AGECE RM: TBD

Instructor:

Larry Parnell –

Associate Professor and Program Director

The George Washington University – Masters in Strategic PR

BS Journalism, Boston University

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Office Hours: 6:00 PM – 7 PM on class nights

Course Overview

Three Keys

The course will focus on three principal aspects of an effective media relations strategy:

- 1) developing a newsworthy story idea;
- 2) packaging it in the most attractive way; and
- 3) how to identify and contact the right journalists to secure effective coverage.

The course goal is to provide you with the strategies, tools and techniques for successful media relations in the new media world. The course will also explore media relations as a key tactic in an overall strategic communications program, covering both traditional and online media and applying classroom discussion and readings along with practical exercises.

Guest Speakers

Periodically, we will invite guest speakers from traditional and online news media as well as communications staffers from DC area corporations, PR firms and associations. You will be expected to listen, participate and apply the lessons learned in the course.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, you should be able to develop and pitch a news story to the media with confidence and a greater chance of success. You will also understand the role of media relations in an overall communications plan. Further, you will have a more sophisticated understanding of how to approach and leverage media outlets, both online and offline, and navigate the complex media landscape in Washington DC and beyond.

Course Methods and Rules

Course Work

All work for this class should be typed, double-spaced, spellchecked, have one-inch margins, and use 12-point Times-Roman font. Use Associated Press style.

Late work will be marked down one full grade for each class it is late. If you have extenuating circumstances or need special accommodations, please see the instructor before the due date. Work is due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. Neatness, punctuation, and grammar count as part of your grade.

Class Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss a class it is your responsibility to notify the instructor and make sure any assignments due reach the instructor on time to receive full credit. It is also the student's responsibility to get lecture notes from a classmate and complete the readings as assigned. Regardless of the reason for missing a class, you will not be able to make up missed class participation points.

Ethics Policy

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Report any violations you witness to the instructor. Anyone breaching this policy is subject to expulsion from the master's degree program.

Disability Statement

If you are a student with a documented disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services – 202-994-8250, dss@gwu.edu.

In Case of Emergency

If you suspect there may be a closing, please visit the University home page and look for an announcement or call the University emergency hotline (202-994-5050). If there is a closing or class cancellation for any reason – bad weather, my illness, power outage, etc. – I will attempt to send a class e-mail and post the closing or cancellation on our announcements page in Blackboard. Regardless of the circumstances, you should still submit all assignments that are due that day. You should also be prepared to make up the class via Blackboard.

Course Texts and Readings

Required Texts

- Henderson, David, Making News – A Straight Shooting Guide to Media Relations, iUniverse Publishing, Lincoln, NE 2006
- Holtz, Shel, *Public Relations on the Net*, AMACOM, American Management Association, New York, NY. 2002

Selected Readings – available on Blackboard

- Yale, David R (with Andrew Carothers); *The Publicity Handbook*. McGraw Hill, 2001
- Weiner, Mark; *Unleashing the Power of PR, A Contrarian's Guide to Marketing and Communications*, Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Case Studies

Selected case studies will be reviewed in class, form the basis for short papers and/or be subject matter for quizzes

Course Handouts

In addition to your text, you will also be expected to read miscellaneous articles, essays and research studies distributed in the class.

Course Assignments

In this course you will be given:

- 1) series of individual assignments;
- 2) team project and
- 3) a final project.

These assignments are designed to sharpen your research, writing, and media relations skills and enable you to identify news trends/opportunities in order to produce more effective media plans and results for your company, organization or clients.

In addition, you will be given 3 short quizzes based on the readings and classroom activities. These will be administered at the instructor's discretion – with prior notice to the class.

Individual Assignments

1. For the first assignment you will be asked to prepare a news release on a speech or news event (as provided by the instructor) designed to:
 - a. capture the news items in the speech/study and
 - b. generate media interest and inspire coverage (*10 points*)
2. For the second assignment you will prepare a written analysis (3-5 pages) of a recent news story you have selected from a business, lifestyle or daily publication, website or broadcast. You will identify the media relations technique and story angle likely used to get coverage and determine who the client/company is “behind” the story. You will illustrate the key point, assess the outcome and determine if other stories have run elsewhere that demonstrate an organized pattern or strategy at work. (*10 points*)
3. For the third and final individual assignment, you will prepare and deliver a pitch to a working journalist (guest speaker) for a news story on a topic provided by the instructor. In addition you will submit a short paper detailing the pitch and citing the techniques used, including references to the texts and classroom discussion. Your grade will be based on the use of media relation techniques as covered in the class, the response from the “expert,” and references to the text. (*15 points*)

Group Assignment

You will join a small group of classmates with the goal of tracking recent media coverage (e.g., over the last 6 months) for an assigned company or organization. You will assess the coverage's impact (positive, negative or neutral) and make recommendations on how to sustain or improve those results utilizing media relations techniques and strategies discussed in class and the readings.

You will be graded as a group for this assignment, with allowances for each individual's contributions to the end product. . The grade will be based on the completeness of your analysis of the coverage, identification of trends and outcomes of the coverage, and the quality of the recommendations made to improve or sustain the coverage. *(20 points)*

Final Paper/Project

You will research, develop and present to the class a comprehensive media relations strategy plan for your company, client or non-profit organization. The plan must include all the components covered in class – e.g., research, coverage trend analysis, primary and secondary contact strategy, pitch/story angle to be utilized in seeking meaningful coverage, budget, and results measurement. The target media can be any combination of print, broadcast or online media and their selection should support a serious business objective.

You will present your final paper/project to your classmates – who will serve in the role of senior management of the client/company/organization. Their feedback and comments will be factored into the project grade. Other key elements in determining the grade will be references to texts and discussion, citations of specific techniques used (and a rationalization therefore), a clearly articulated business objective, and the completeness of the target media list. *(20 points)*

Quizzes

Three quizzes will be given during the semester. These will be based on the readings, case studies, and/or guest speaker presentations. You will be notified in advance of each quiz and the subject matter to be covered. *(5 points each, total 15 points)*

Class Participation

In addition to grades on your assignments and projects, you will be awarded points for your participation in each class discussion and activity. Therefore, it is important that you critically read all assigned texts and handouts and prepare your assignments according to the course guidelines.

To be considered as participation, your comments must add to or further the discussion and reflect the comments of your classmates. In other words, your participation must add value – not just another opinion or casual observation – to the discussion. (*10 Points*).

NOTE: participation is not graded in the first class or classes in which you present your group and final projects. You cannot make up participation points if you are absent.

Points Summary

- Individual assignments (3) – 35 points (total)
- Group Assignment – 20 points
- Final project – 20points
- Quiz (3) – 15 points
- Class Participation - 1 point each eligible class, 10 total

Total points available = 100

(Final grade will reflect the total number of points earned compared to a traditional 100 point grading scale)

Course Evaluation/Rubric

Letter Grades

- A 96-100
- A- 90-95
- B+ 87-89
- B 83-86
- B- 80-82
- C+ 77-79
- C 73-76
- C- 70-72 (lowest grade to pass)
- D+ 67-69
- D 63-66
- D- 60-62
- F 59 or below
- I Incomplete:

I will grant an “I” grade if you fail to complete work due to circumstances I deem legitimate and sufficient, your prior performance has been satisfactory, and you have a plan for completing the work. The “I” will convert to an “F” if you do not submit the missing work by the agreed-upon submission deadline.

Grading Standards

- **A:** In a business environment this assignment would distinguish you as a top communications professional in your organization. It represents work that is outstanding in every way; e.g., strong research, smart thinking, appropriate style, syntax, and grammar and demonstrates the strategic use of media relations to achieve a communications objective.
 - **B:** In a business environment this work would reflect well on you and your organization. You completed the assignment, fulfilled all requirements, and contributed additional ideas and/or insights but the likely results would be relatively ordinary and not meet your communications objectives. The assignment would be judged as adequate but undistinguished.
 - **C:** You completed the assignment and fulfilled the requirements but the work would not achieve all of your media relations/communications objectives without major revisions in logic, target media selection or approach strategy.
 - **D:** You fulfilled some of the requirements of the assignment, but not all. This work would need to be completely reworked before it would represent you or your company professionally and achieve any meaningful media relations objectives.
- F:** You did not submit the assignment.