

**George Washington University  
Graduate School of Political Management  
Summer 2008**

**PSPR 206 – Ethical Standards in Public Relations & Public Affairs**

- Location: 1957 E Street, N.W. , Room B17 (Elliot School)
- Class Time: Tuesdays (May 20 – July 22), 7:10 – 9:00 pm, **except as noted on the schedule below**. Students should expect that any class may extend until as late as 9:40 pm.
- Professor: Ken Kellner, Esq. (kekellner@yahoo.com)
- Required Texts: Karla K. Gower, *Legal and Ethical Considerations for Public Relations* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2008) (Publisher: Waveland Press, Inc., Long Grove, IL), ISBN 1-57766-554-6 or 978-1-57766-554-0. )
- Kathy Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Bronstein, *Ethics in Public Relations: Responsible Advocacy* (1<sup>st</sup> Edition 2006) (Publisher: Sage Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, California), ISBN 1-4129-1798-0 (paperback).
- Supplemental readings throughout the course as assigned by the instructor or as suggested by students in the class.
- Course Description: “For we are debating no trivial question, but the manner in which a man ought to live.” Socrates, as reported by Plato in the “Republic” (c. 390 bce).
- This course explores the growing role and importance of ethics in public relations and public affairs. Students analyze personal and professional ethical assumptions and norms in American society, and consider standards, guidelines and codes of conduct that should guide relations with clients, the media, public officials, legislators, voters, employees, and others. Students learn how to identify and respond to ethical challenges, and they prepare papers as well as a research project that addresses ethical conduct in a public relations or public affairs setting.
- Assignments:
- (1) Students are expected to be prepared for all classes and to participate actively in class discussions on a weekly basis.
  - (2) Unless otherwise directed by the instructor, students must submit a one page (maximum of two pages) single spaced summary of the weekly reading assignments. The weekly papers should identify briefly the issues of ethics raised in the readings as well as provide a brief response that reflects the opinion of the student on the matter. As assigned by the instructor, students may be able to select their own reading for analysis.
  - (3) Students must prepare an approximately 3-5 page single-spaced essay on the topic of Culture and Public Relations. Prior to drafting the essay, students should read Chapter 10 of the *Fitzpatrick* text and are expected to consult other course readings and relevant outside sources. All references in the essay must be properly cited. The essay should address your view of

whether the authors you cite are correct in the assumptions they make. Questions that might guide your thinking could include: (1) Should cultural norms impact ethical decision-making in public relations; and (2) What are the different ethical issues that should be considered by industries and public relations professionals that operate globally? Students must be prepared to discuss their essays in class. The essays are due at the class on June 24.

(4) Working in groups, students must choose and research either a for-profit or non-profit corporation for the purpose of determining whether the entity should be considered an “ethical” or “socially responsible” organization. The entity selected should have international dimensions (*i.e.*, operates within several nations). Students within groups must work together to define criteria by which the corporation should be judged and to support the selection of those criteria using readings or other sources. The group should then analyze the conduct of the corporation using their selected criteria, drawing upon publicly available information including annual reports, media accounts, regulatory compliance, reports of “watchdog” organizations, and materials published or maintained by government agencies. The group should explain why it believes the company was a leader or failure in ethics or social responsibility by presenting examples of the policies, programs, and initiatives of the corporation. The group report of criteria and analysis must be submitted in a 12-15 page paper at the start of the last class on July 22. Groups should be prepared to discuss their papers with the class.

**Grading:**

Graded assignments include class preparation and participation (20% of course grade), weekly written assignments (20% of course grade), the 3-5 page essay (25% of course grade), and the 12-15 page substantive group project (35% of course grade). Grades of A or A- will be awarded only for exceptional achievement.

Students should expect that points will be deducted for any assignment that is incomplete. Late papers will also have points deducted, and also will not be accepted without the instructor’s prior consent.

**Academic Integrity:**

Students are responsible for observing George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management policies and regulations regarding student conduct and academic dishonesty. Any form of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will be subject to the imposition of sanctions by the instructor and/or University officials.

### COURSE OUTLINE

**Students are advised that assignments in the course outline may change depending on factors such as the pace of the class and availability of guest speakers.**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>TEXT ASSIGNMENT</b>
May 20	Welcome to the Course; Introduction to Ethics and the Notion of the Public Relations Professional	Fitzpatrick, Chapter 1
May 27 (No class)	<b>Work on project as assigned.</b>	
June 5 ( <b>Special Thursday class to accommodate Guest Speaker</b> )	Philosophical Foundations: Understanding Ethics and Ethical Decision Making; Analysis of Ethical Codes of Conduct Applicable to Public Relations Professionals	Gower, Chapter 1; and additional reading to be assigned
June 10 ( <b>Guest Speaker</b> )	Ethical Challenges in Public Relations; Crisis Public Relations	Fitzpatrick, Chapters 3 and 7
June 17	Responsibility and Accountability; Defining Public Relations Speech	Fitzpatrick, Chapter 2; Gower, Chapter 2
June 24 ( <b>Research essays due</b> ) ( <b>Guest Speaker</b> )	Global Ethics in Public Relations; Institutional Social Responsibility	Fitzpatrick, Chapters 9 and 10
July 1 (No class)	<b>Work on group projects.</b>	
July 8 ( <b>Guest Speaker</b> )	Public Relations and the Processes of Government; Protecting and Regulating Public Relations Speech	Gower, Chapters 3 and 4
July 15	Ethical Breaches of Conduct in Public Relations; Seeking a More Ethical Profession; Imperatives of Truth and Transparency	Fitzpatrick, Chapters 4, 5 and 6
July 22 ( <b>Group projects due</b> )	Special Topics/Presentation of Projects	Gower, Chapter 5; Fitzpatrick Chapter 8; additional reading to be assigned