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| **M.P.S. in Strategic Public Relations** |
| **PSPR 6223: Public Opinion and Political Socialization** |
| 3 Credits |

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# Instructor Information

## Instructor: Ben Zingman, PhD

**About Dr. Z**

A successful issues communications, marketing, crisis and public relations strategist, writer, and manager, I served corporate, trade association and non-profit clients for nearly 40 years. Using the skills and judgment honed at top-tier Washington, DC, public relations firms, in 2003 I formed bzingcom to provide clients with personalized, reality-based counseling, program development, media and presentation training and executive writing services including speeches, online content, and feature articles.

Since opening its doors, bzingcom produced solid results for a wide range of clients including the American Association of Port Authorities, American Chemistry Council, Chlorine Institute, Edison Electric Institute, Federal Aviation Administration, Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Energy Association, John Adams Associates, National Solid Waste Management Association, Prince William Hospital, Turn Key Office Solutions, Veolia Transportation and more. Projects included national trade show and convention programming, strategic public affairs program development, executive writing, crisis communications plans and drills, marketing communications and media relations programs.

I began my career as a teacher in New York City and at Rutgers University where I earned a Ph.D. in political science. My dissertation, Beyond the Fourth Branch, focused on the role of the news media in American politics.

A graduate educator since 2004, at GWU’s Graduate School of Political Management I teach courses on “Public Opinion, Political Socialization and Public Relations,” and “Managing Association and Non-Profit Communications in a Changing Environment.” Earlier, at Johns Hopkins, I introduced graduate courses on “Strategic Communications Program Management,” and “Media, Power and Politics.” I am proud to have earned the GWU College of Professional Studies Faculty Excellence Award in 2011.

The bottom line? I am a PR lifer, now retired, with extensive Washington experience who believes that we can —and should—enjoy what we do and find meaning in our labors.

**Communication**

The best way to reach me on an urgent matter is by phone (443-802-8809). For routine communications, please use my GWU e-mail. I try to respond to all email within 24 hours, so if you’ve not received a timely response, please follow-up with me by phone. Course materials will be submitted via Blackboard.

## Contact Information

Weekly Professor Chat: Mondays – 7:30-8:30 PM (ET)

Phone Number: 443-802-8809 (cell) or 410-531-3458 (home/office)

Email Address: bzingman@gwu.edu

# Course Details

## Course Description and Overview

**Our ten-week** course will involve **asynchronous online learning**, with assigned readings, open discussion and guest speakers. Study teams of three or at most four students will be formed during Class 1. These teams will be responsible for sharing the readings throughout the course. Naturally, students are expected to write their own papers.

**The course is divided into four sections:**

* Section 1 – Public Opinion: What is It and Why Do We Care About It? Weeks 1-4
* Section 2 – Political Socialization and Political Engagement: Weeks 5-6
* Section 3 – Role of Traditional & Social Media in Public Opinion and Public Policy: Weeks 7-8
* Section 4 – Communications Lessons from The COVID 19 Pandemic and Critical Race Theory Debates: Weeks 9-10

## Course Learning Objectives

As result of completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Examine the role, formation, measurement, and use of public opinion in contemporary U.S. public affairs and public relations.
2. Explain the processes that shape opinion, political, and marketplace behavior, and the role we play as communicators in engaging and influencing these processes.
3. Critically analyze how communications activities are utilized in the real world to influence opinions, attitudes, and behavior.

**NOTE:** Please support your views, assertions, and conclusions with references and citations that allow your readers the opportunity to check sources and how you use them.

## Program Learning Objectives

Upon the completion of the Masters in SPR, students will have obtained an enhanced

understanding and skills in:

1. Fundamentals of effective, strategic communications;
2. Best practices for writing, media relations and strategic communications planning and implementation;
3. Leadership in communications on a sound ethical and financial basis;
4. Managing the implementation of strategic communications strategies.

**Graduate School Expectations**

Students enrolled in a graduate program should take their academic responsibilities seriously and be prepared to meet the following expectations:

1. Utilize effective time management skills so as to complete and submit their assignments on their required due dates and times.
2. Have attained a mastery of written communication skills including proper sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and word usage.
3. Understand how to properly format in-text citations and references for resources and information integrated into their written assignments.

**Course Evaluation**

At the end of the semester, students will be given the opportunity to evaluate the course through GW’s online course evaluation system. It is very important that you take the time to complete an evaluation. Students are also encouraged to provide feedback throughout the course of the semester by contacting:

**Lawrence Parnell**Director, Strategic Public Relations Program lparnell@gwu.edu

**Suzanne Farrand**Director of Academic Administration, GSPMsfarrand@gwu.edu | 202-994-9309

## Required Text and Learning Materials

* Erikson, Robert, and Tedin, Kent. *American Public Opinion,* 10th Edition (2019).

 *Additional and supplemental reading materials will be assigned and provided on Blackboard.*

## Evaluation and Grading

This course will include the following types of assessment.

## 1. Elevator Speech (0 points)

## A 1–2 paragraph discussion post will be assigned in Week 1, which will allow us to get to know each other and will allow me to assess your writing skills.  Note the quality of writing is important both in this class *and in your careers* and will be reflected in the grading of subsequent papers.

##

## 2. Initial Paper (25 points) & Strategic Paper (50 points): How Organizations Influence Public Opinion

## Students will choose an “issue area” to study from among the following:  1) Consumer affairs; 2) Education; 3) Energy/Environment; 4) Health & Medicine; 5) International Relations; 6) Security and Defense; 7) Science & Technology; 8) Transportation.  Choices will be submitted in Week 2 with conflicts resolved on a first-received basis.

## Within the chosen issue area, *students will study a specific organization* (a company, professional group, or trade association), *or* a not-for-profit organization (such as a charity, labor union, university or NGO) *or* a political entity (such as a legislative committee or government agency at the federal, state or local level. *Political candidates, individual elected officials, campaign organizations, PACs and Super PACs are not allowed.*

## An overview of the papers follows.  *A formal rubric for grading will be provided on Blackboard.*

## Initial Paper (5-6 pages):  Examine the public opinion environment for the chosen issue area and organization:  What are the main drivers?  Who are the main players?  Are they adversaries to your chosen organization?  Allies?  Competitors?  Why is this important?  What role does your organization play - is it a leader?  Should it be?  Or, is it OK being less visible?  Why?

##

## Why is your organization trying to shape public opinion and how does the effort relate to the mission or goals of the organization? Put another way, what is the organization’s strategic communications objective and what role does public opinion play in achieving it?  The paper will be assigned during Week 1 and is due in Week 4.

##

## The analysis must utilize, support, or if you prefer, refute course readings, speakers and other materials.  The use of additional sources is permitted, *but not as a substitute* for course materials.

##

## Strategic Paper (10-12 pages):  Building on the initial paper, the strategic paper will require students to analyze *how effectively their subject organizations utilize and manage public opinion to achieve organizational goals.*  How does the organization engage in the public opinion process and with what effect?  How can or should the organization improve communications efforts?  What steps do you recommend?

##

## The analysis too must utilize, support, or if you prefer, refute course readings, speakers and other materials.  The use of additional sources is permitted, *but not as a substitute* for course materials.

##

## Students’ analyses will be based on publicly available information including websites, news articles, social media, testimony and speeches*, and at least one interview with a “player” from your organization,* *its adversaries, allies or competitors, or a journalist covering the organization*. The questionnaire you develop for the interview will be graded for a maximum of 5 points of the total 50 points. Interview questionnaires are due in Week 6 and the papers are due during Week 10.

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## 3. “Blog and Tweet” (10 points)

## Students will write two “Blog and Tweet” assignments due in Weeks 3 and 7.  These are brief (one-page maximum) blogs and tweets keyed to any breaking news story of your choosing, written from the perspective of the organization you choose to study.  (Example: suppose you choose the American Red Cross, and during Week Three – when the first “B&T” is due -- there’s a story about inflation.  You might blog about the importance of contributing to the Red Cross to offset the rising costs of providing the organization’s crucial services.) Each “B&T” assignment will be worth five points towards the overall grade (a maximum of 10 pts in all).

##

## 4. Team Evaluation (5 points)

## There is a *substantial reading load* in this class.  Study teams of three people (or at most four) allow students to keep pace.   Therefore, students are required to participate in study teams, which I will create randomly.  (After all, in the workplace, we often do not have the chance to choose our friends as team partners.)  It is expected that teams will divide the work and coordinate assignments on their own, but I will be available to assist as needed.

##

## Each team member is expected to do a full share of the work, and teammates will provide a written evaluation of one another at the end of the semester.  The evaluation you write is worth up to five points, and the evaluation you receive is worth up to five points for a total of 10 points towards the course grade.

##

## 5. Class Work/In-Class Performance (10 points)

## Students’ in-class performance will account for 10 percent of their grade.

## In-class performance is not simply a matter of how often students contribute, but rather, how well they are prepared to discuss specific concepts and readings, and whether their input is thoughtful, provocative, and lively. Do students inject relevant breaking news stories and other timely materials?   Do they use the readings or guest speakers to help explain their views? Are they advancing the discussion? Do they contribute articles or other information to the class discussion board?

***Full assignment descriptions, rubrics, and specific requirements can be found on Blackboard.***

Assessments will contribute toward the student’s grade based on the following chart.

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| --- | --- |
| **Assignment Category** | **Points** |
| **Elevator Speech:** A 1-2 paragraph assignment for me to assess writing skills (Due in Week 1) | 0 |
| **Initial Paper:** An overview of the issue environment for each student’s selected organization (Assigned in Week 1; Due in Week 4) | 25 points |
| **Blog and Tweet (#1 & #2):** A blog and accompanying Tweet representing your organization’s interests or point of view (Due in Weeks 3 and 7) | 10 points (total) |
| **Strategic Paper**: Culminating course assignment. (Assigned in Week 4; Due in Week 9). Includes **interview questionnaire and three-national poll questions** (Due in Week 6) | 50 points |
| **Class Work:** Participation, class exercises, overall contribution including articles or other materials posted, role in discussions | 10 points |
| **Team Evaluations:** Team members grade one another based on performance, cooperation and contribution to study teams | 10 points |
| *Total* | *100 points* |

**Missing & Late Assignments and Extra Credit**

**Missed or late assignments will be penalized, unless there is a prior approved excuse.**

**Extra credit will not be offered in this course.**

**Grading Standards**

A: In a business environment the work product would distinguish the student as a top communications professional. The product is outstanding in every way; e.g., strategic thinking, well-chosen tactics, strong research including a solid use of course readings to support arguments, appropriate style, syntax, and grammar. The work product demonstrates the strategic use of communications to achieve organizational objectives.

B: In a business environment this work would reflect well on the student and the student’s work team. The assignment fulfilled all requirements, and contributed additional ideas and/or insights, but the end product was relatively ordinary. The assignment would be judged as adequate, workmanlike and serviceable.

 C: In a business environment, this work might be sent back for revision. Either the student missed a key portion of the assignment or failed to communicate effectively. The assignment was completed and fulfilled the requirements, but the work would not achieve all communications objectives without major revisions in logic, style, tactics or strategy.

D: The student fulfilled some of the requirements of the assignment, but not all. This effort would need to be completely reworked before it would represent the student or the “client” professionally and achieve any meaningful communications objectives.

F: The assignment was not submitted or was submitted too late to be graded.

# Tentative Course Schedule

The instructor reserves the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar. Final dates and details will be found on the Blackboard course site.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Topic** | **Lessons** | **Readings Due** | **Assignments Due** |
| 1 | Introduction -- Politics, Public Opinion & Political Socialization & Public Relations | Course Introduction Part 1 (video)Course Introduction Part 2 (text)Week 1 Lesson | Erikson & Tedin, Chap 1Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion, Chap 1 James Madison, Federalist Paper #10 V.O. Key, Public Opinion and American Democracy, Chap 1 | Elevator Speeches Due (on Discussion Board) |
| 2 | Public Opinion Polling -- A Conundrum of Controversy | Week 2 Lesson | Erikson & Tedin, Chap 2George Bishop, The Illusion of Public Opinion, Chap 1 and first part of Chap 2 (pps. 19-36) |  |
| 3 | Dynamics of Public Opinion I | Week 3 Lesson | Erikson & Tedin, Chap 3 & 4Lydia Denworth, “Conservative & Liberal Brains Might Have Some Real Differences,” Scientific American, 26 Oct 2020 | Tweet & Blog #1 Due |
| 4 | Dynamics of Public Opinion II | Week 4 Lesson | Erikson & Tedin, Chap 7CNN, “What a new report tells us about how people voted in 2020”Perry Bacon, “American Politics Now Has Two Big Racial Divides,” fivethirtyeight, 3 May 2021Michael Tackett, “Trump Fulfills His Promise on Abortion, and To Evangelicals,” NYT, May 16, 2019 | Initial Paper Due |
| 5 | Socialization and Values -- What Are They and Why Should We care? | Week 5 Lesson | Erikson & Tedin, Chap 5Walter Lippmann, Phantom Public, Chap 1  |  |
| 6 | Engagement, Genes, and Trust | Week 6 Lesson | Erikson & Tedin, Chap 6Doug Sosnick et. al., Applebee’s America, Chap. 1Edelman, Trust Barometer 2021 | Poll Questions & Questionnaire Due |
| 7 | Understanding Media I | Week 7 Lesson | Erikson & Tedin, Chap 8Additional readings TBD – See Blackboard | Tweet & Blog #2 Due |
| 8 | Understanding Media II | Week 8 Lesson | *Readings TBD – See Blackboard* |  |
| 9 | Mini Case Studies -- How Critical Race Theory Became an Issue in the 2021 Virginia Gubernatorial Race | *TBD – See Blackboard* | Erikson & Tedin, Chap 9 & 10*Additional readings TBD – See Blackboard* |  |
| 10 | Mini Case Studies -- Lessons for Communications from the COVID-19 Pandemic | *TBD – See Blackboard* | Erikson & Tedin, Chap 11*Additional readings TBD – See Blackboard* | Strategic Paper DueTeam Evaluations Due |

# Expectations and Responsibilities

## Blackboard Site

A Blackboard course site has been set up for this course. Each student is expected to check the site regularly throughout the semester to review weekly course content, view announcements, and submit assignments. Students can access the course site through [GWU Blackboard](https://blackboard.gwu.edu/).

Support for Blackboard is available at 202-994-4948 or the [IT Blackboard web page](https://it.gwu.edu/blackboard).

Please note that your access to this course on Blackboard will continue for one month after the course ends. If you wish to keep any work or materials, you must download or save them before the course closes.

## Technology Requirements

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the required technology to fully participate in this course. The minimum technology requirements for learning online at GW are outlined on the [Technical Requirements and Support](https://online.gwu.edu/technical-requirements-and-support) web page.

If you have any problems with the technology in this course, you can seek technological support from GW in a variety of ways, outlined on the [IT Support](https://it.gwu.edu/support) website.

GW is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment that is accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities.

The following links provide more information about the accessibility of technologies that may be used in this course:

* [Blackboard accessibility](https://www.blackboard.com/blackboard-accessibility-commitment)
* [Microsoft Office accessibility](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility)
* [Adobe accessibility](https://www.adobe.com/accessibility.html)
* [Vimeo accessibility](https://vimeo.com/blog/post/accessibility-updates-to-the-vimeo-player/)
* [YouTube accessibility](https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/189278?hl=en)
* [VoiceThread accessibility](https://voicethread.com/about/features/accessibility/)
* [Webex accessibility](https://help.webex.com/en-us/84har3/Cisco-Webex-Meetings-and-Cisco-Webex-Events-Accessibility-Features)

If you have any issues regarding the accessibility of the technology used in this course, please contact your instructor. You may also explore the [Disability Support Services](https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/) website.

## Technology Expectations

Regarding technology skills, you should be able to:

* Create documents and presentation slides
* Use a webcam and microphone
* Use a digital camera or scanner
* Upload files, including recordings and images
* Be open to learning and registering for new technologies
* Be flexible when technological glitches happen (which is a given)
* Seek technological help when necessary by contacting the Division of Information Technology

If you have any problems with the technology expectations in this course, please contact your instructor.

## Getting Started

Everything you need to get started in the course is contained within the Blackboard course site. You can use the menu links on the left side panel to view different components. The content for each learning unit is divided into folders—one for each week. More unit folders will unlock as weeks in the course progress.

## Participation Policy

All students are expected to learn and contribute by being a positive participant in discussions, activities, presentations, and assignments. If you have an unavoidable conflict or become ill, in a way that will affect your participation in a given week, please notify your instructor immediately.

## Communication & Feedback

Important announcements will be posted periodically via Blackboard’s announcement feature throughout the course. The instructor will strive to reply to student questions within 24 hours and provide feedback for assignments within a week after the due date.

## Grading Scale

Following is the grade scale for all CPS classes:

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| Grade | Range | Grade Standard |
| A | 94-100 | Your work is outstanding and ready for submission in a professional environment. Your material, effort, research, and writing demonstrate superior work. |
| A- | 90-93 | Represents solid work with minor errors. Overall, excellent work. |
| B+ | 87-89 | Very good. Represents well-written material, research, and presentation, but needs some minor work. |
| B | 83-86 | Good work, but needs reworking and more effort. |
| B- | 80-82 | You’ve completed the assignment, but you are not meeting all of the requirements. |
| C+ | 77-79 | Needs improvement in content and in effort. Shows some motivation and concern. |
| C | 73-76 | Needs reworking, improved effort, and additional research. Shows minimal motivation and concern. |
| C- | 70-72 (lowest grade to pass) | Poor performance. Major errors, too many misspellings, problems with accuracy, etc. |
| F | Below 70 | Unacceptable performance, or inability to submit the assignment. |

## Netiquette

Please observe the following rules of netiquette for communicating online:

* Remain professional, respectful, and courteous at all times.
* Remember that a real human being wrote each post and will read what you write in response. It is easy to misinterpret discussion posts. Let’s give the benefit of the doubt.
* If you have a strong opinion on a topic, it is acceptable to express it as long as it is not phrased as an attack. Please be gracious with differing opinions.
* When upset, wait a day or two prior to posting. Messages posted (or emailed) in anger are often regretted later.
* Proofread and use the spell check tool when you type a post. It makes the post easier to read and helps your readers understand what you are saying.

Your instructor reserves the right to delete any post that is deemed inappropriate for the discussion forum, blog, or wiki without prior notification to the student. This includes any post containing language that is offensive, rude, profane, racist, or hateful. Posts that are seriously off-topic or serve no purpose other than to vent frustration will also be removed.

## Credit Hour Policy

For this **10-week, 3-credit course** there will be an average of **9-10 hours** of combined direct instruction and independent learning per week.  More information about GWU’s credit hour policy can be found at [the Office of the Provost’s Policies](https://provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines) web page (Under: Assignment of Credit Hour Policy).

# University Policies & Services

## Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is an integral part of the educational process, and GW takes these matters very seriously. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and in other ways outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity. Students accused of academic integrity violations should contact the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) to learn more about their rights and options in the process. Outcomes can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the university, including a transcript notation. For more information, please refer to the [Office of Academic Integrity website](https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/academic-integrity), email (rights@gwu.edu), or call (202-994-6757).

## Copyright Statement

Unless explicitly allowed by the instructor, course materials, class discussions, and examinations are created for and expected to be used by class participants only.  The recording and rebroadcasting of such material, by any means, is forbidden.

The Copyright Act (17 U.S.C. § 10) governs the rights attributed to owners of copyrighted work. Under certain circumstances, educational institutions may provide copies of copyrighted works to students. The copies may not be copied nor used for any other purpose besides private study, scholarship, or research. Users should not provide electronic copies of any materials provided on this course’s Blackboard site to unauthorized users. If a user fails to comply with Fair Use restrictions, he/she may be held liable for copyright infringement. No further transmission or electronic distribution is permitted.

## Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Please contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Please contact [Disability Support Services](https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/) if you need additional accommodations for accessing electronic course materials.

## University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays

Students must notify faculty as early as possible, but no later than three weeks prior to the absence, of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. If the holiday falls in the first three weeks of class, the student must inform the faculty within the first week of the semester that they are enrolled in the course.

To the greatest extent possible, faculty must continue to extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations.

Faculty who intend to observe a religious holiday must arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities.

For the full text of the policy and calendar of religious holidays, please see [the Office of the Provost’s Policies](https://provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines) web page (Religious Holidays document).

## Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services.  They can be contacted by phone at 202-994-8250 or in person at Rome Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information visit the [Disability Support Services](https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/) website.

## Counseling and Psychological Services

GW’s Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. For additional information call 202-994-5300 or visit the [Counseling and Psychological Services](https://healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services%20) website.

## The Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in Gelman Library at 2130 H St NW in Suite 221 and they can be reached at 202-994-3765 or via email at gwriter@gwu.edu.  You can [schedule writing center appointments](https://gwu.mywconline.com/), both in-person or by phone, in advance.  Daytime and evening hours are available. Check for this semester's hours at the [writing center contact page](https://writingcenter.gwu.edu/contact-us-0).  The Writing Center does offer Summer hours.

## GWU Libraries

Off campus students have full access to all of the research resources, services, and assistance that the Library offers.  The GW community has access to 500+ online subscription databases and to millions of items, electronic and print, in the library catalog.   Off-campus students even have additional privileges because the Library will FedEx print materials to your home. For more information visit the [GW Libraries](https://library.gwu.edu/) homepage.

Call the Ask Us desk at 202-994-6048 or [contact someone at the library](http://www.go.gwu.edu/ask) to answer any questions.  For questions beyond “Do you have this book/article?” and “How do I login?” use the website mentioned to make a research consultation appointment with a librarian.  Librarians are there to guide students through any aspect of the research process, from selecting and narrowing a topic, crafting a research strategy to citation management.

## Safety and Security

* **In an emergency**: call GWPD at 202-994-6111 or call 911
* **For situation-specific actions**: review the [Emergency Response Handbook](https://safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook)
* **In an active violence situation**: [Get Out, Hide Out or Take Out](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpBT6tAa0dY&feature=youtu.be)
* **Stay informed**: review [notification tools for staying informed during emergency and safety related situations](https://safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed)